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The Man She Hated

By Georgette MacMillan

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LOVE STORY MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED WEEKLY

Vol. IX **February 10, 1923** **No. 3**

The Man She Hated

by Georgette MacMillan

CHAPTER I.

A RECKLESS RIDER.

FROM the gate on which he sat, Oliver Strong, with eager eyes, drank in the beauty of the scene before him. He gloried in the purple and gold slope of the hill where pine trees with deep-green tufted tops lifted straight slender bodies skyward, in the white road beneath, in the distant range of hills traced in delicate blue outline against the far horizon. The long rays of the September sun bathed the whole landscape in a hazy, mysterious light, making it seem half real, half a dream. Its familiar beauty made a real appeal to Strong, and to-morrow he would be leaving it, perhaps never to return.

He sighed. He was young and impressionable, and rather lonely. An orphan, he had been brought up under the care of an uncle, Ralph Strong, the chimneys of whose farm he could just see from his exalted perch. But now that his education was completed, Strong had decided that the best place for his orphaned nephew was on his brother's ranch in Arizona. Oliver was to leave the next day.

"Get off that gate! I want to jump it."

The young man was brought out of his reverie with a jerk. He turned quickly. In the field behind him, a young girl of about fifteen, clad in boyish riding togs and astride a beautiful chestnut mare, was signaling him imperiously with her whip. Strong looked at her in silence, noting, manlike, the fine regular features, the large violet eyes and pale, clear complexion, the short blond hair, ruffled by the wind.

She was quite close now, holding her impatient horse with some difficulty. "Get down!" she said again in a note of command.

Oliver did not budge.

For a moment, amazement dominated the anger in the girl's eyes. Then she became more furious than ever. It was obvious that she was not accustomed to being thwarted.

"Are you going to get down?" she asked impatiently.

"Not until you ask me properly." Oliver Strong smiled.

"I won't ask you again. I'll make you." Following her words, the girl raised her whip and brought it down heavily upon the young man's shoulder.

Aroused at last, he leaned forward, snatched the whip from her hand and broke it in two.

The rider's face flamed crimson with anger. Scarcely knowing what she did, she retreated to the middle of the field, dug her heels into the mare's side, then came straight for the gate.

"The little devil!" Oliver could hardly believe his eyes. The girl was going to jump the gate over his head. It meant almost certain death for him, possibly for her, too.

This was no time to try persuasive methods. He was off the gate and running forward in an instant, and as the mare came pounding past, he seized the bridle. Hanging on to it with all his young strength, he swung the frightened animal around. The mare plunged and reared, but Oliver held fast. And to his infinite relief, the daring girl kept her seat. Only once did it seem that she would certainly be thrown; then the thought of the lovely, impulsive little face beneath the plunging hoofs, for the moment wiped all the anger from the boy's heart.

When the horse had become more quiet, he turned to the girl.

"Do you realize that if I hadn't acted just when I did probably we would both be dead now?" he asked seriously. "You're much too *young*"—he stressed the word because instinctively he knew it would gall her—"and headstrong to be allowed out alone, young lady. You should have a guardian."

"Let go my reins!" The red had left the girl's cheeks. She was pale to the lips, but her spirit was unyielding and the eyes she turned to Oliver were resentful.

He made no move to obey, but with soothing words and pats coaxed the mare toward the gate, opened it, and led horse and rider through.

"I'll let you go now, you rude undisciplined child. But some day I'll make you say you're sorry." He released his hold on the reins and raised his hat.

The girl dug her heels into the chestnut's sides and galloped down the incline of the hill. Suddenly she turned in her saddle and shouted back, "I'd die first!"

The next moment the purple and gold slope of the hill had hidden her from sight, and Oliver had the countryside to himself once more.

He thoughtfully closed the gate. As he did so, his eyes fell on the broken whip lying by the side of the hedge. He moved forward and picked it up. A cursory examination revealed the name, "Jane Deering," on the handle.

With a smile, Strong carefully put the two halves in his pocket.

The next day he left for his uncle's ranch in Arizona.

CHAPTER II.

THE EPISODE OF THE ROSE.

In a shimmering evening gown of cloudy blue, Mrs. Gordon Esterbrook stood receiving her guests. The exquisitely furnished drawing-room behind her—as were those adjoining—was filled with women in dazzling and bright-colored frocks, with men in faultless, if

more conventional, evening dress. From an inner room, mingling with the pleasant chatter, came the haunting strains of a violin played by a master hand.

"Mrs. Blake Deering and Miss Jane Deering," announced the butler.

Mrs. Esterbrook's slightly bored expression vanished. She came forward eagerly to greet the newcomers, a tall blue-eyed woman in black, and a beautiful girl who was like a spring flower in her soft, yellow evening gown.

"A delightful surprise, Louise," she said to the older woman. "I had no idea you were in town." Then, turning to Jane, "I suppose I must thank you, dear, for tearing your mother away from the country?"

"No, indeed," said Jane, laughing. "Thank your own attractive self."

Mrs. Esterbrook turned again to Mrs. Deering. "Where's Mrs. Gregory?" While Mrs Deering was explaining that Linda Gregory, a cousin with whom Jane was staying in town for a few days, would arrive later, Peter Esterbrook, a good-looking youth with close-cropped red hair, sauntered up.

"You're spring personified, Jane," he said, escorting her to a seat by an open window. "You make even prosaic me feel like poetizing. Where's brother Chris to-night?"

"I haven't seen Chris for weeks," said Jane, a troubled note in her voice.

Peter darted a quick glance at his beautiful companion. He wondered how much she knew of her brother's affairs. It was common talk now that Chris Deering's infatuation for Cecile St. Cloud, a chorus girl, was causing him to become hopelessly in debt.

"I hope he'll put in his appearance," he said. "I'm expecting an awfully nice chap to drop in, a mine owner from Arizona. He might be able to put Chris on to something."

"Dear old Peter!" said Jane affectionately. "It's sweet of you to try to help Chris."

Peter Esterbrook leaned a trifle closer, placed his hand on hers. "It's not entirely on Chris' account, Jane," he said.

She gave a little cry of dismay. "Oh, Peter, are you becoming sentimental, too? And I thought ours was the ideal friendship!"

"Ah, there you are, Jane! Hello Peter!" Linda Gregory, Jane's cousin, a slender black-haired woman in a flame-colored frock, and Mr. George Trevor, a dapper little bald-headed man of fifty, stopped before them.

Fanning herself slowly, Mrs. Gregory sank into the chair Peter had instantly offered. "Who's that interesting-looking young man your mother is piloting about, Peter?" Her detached air gave place to one of interest.

"Oliver Strong, a mine owner from Arizona."

Jane, looking in the direction of Mrs. Esterbrook, saw with her a tall man, rather bronzed, with broad shoulders and deep-set gray eyes. He was not handsome, but there was a quiet strength in his face and something decidedly distinguished in his bearing.

"Why, he's young!" she exclaimed. "I thought all millionaires were at least fifty."

" 'Age cannot wither nor custom stale their infinite variety,' " quoted Linda Gregory gayly. "But Mr. Strong didn't make his millions all by himself, did he, Peter?"

"Not exactly. He was left a lot of land in Arizona by an uncle, I believe. But it was he who discovered that the place was rich in ore."

"Jerizoni is going to sing, Miss Deering," said Mr. Trevor. "Will you let me take you to the music room?"

As the first notes of a rich contralto sounded through the rooms, they moved away together. But the music room was already crowded when they reached there, so they did not remain long.

"Here's Chris," said Jane, as they reentered the drawing-room.

"Hello, Jane. Haven't seen you for ages. Hello, Trevor," was Christopher Deering's casual greeting. He was just a year younger than his sister, and the resemblance between them was marked. But where the fine features of the girl gave evidence of strength and determination, the man's were self-indulgent.

Jane's eyes dwelt with genuine affection upon her brother. "Have you seen Peter?" she asked.

"No, I just came. Ah, there he is steering this way with some one in tow."

"Miss Deering, may I present Mr. Strong?" asked Peter. "Mr. Deering, Mr. Trevor—Mr. Strong."

A moment later, Jane found herself being dexterously piloted by Oliver Strong to a quiet corner.

"And so we meet again, Miss Jane Deering," he said when they were seated.

"Again?" Jane's startled violet eyes met the man's quizzical gray ones. "I thought you were from Arizona? I don't seem to remember——"

"No, you wouldn't." Strong smiled reminiscently and allowed his eyes to rest upon his lovely companion. He found himself wondering at the color of her starry eyes with their long lashes, the flawlessly white shoulders, and the slender pillar of her neck supporting the proud beauty of her little head.

"One day eight years ago—in fact, the day before I left for Arizona—I was sitting on a fence near my uncle's farm at Huntingdale, when a young girl came riding along and imperiously commanded me to get down. I refused. She struck me with her whip. I seized and broke it. Then she recklessly——"

Jane held up her hand. "Enough! So, you were that boy!" She looked at him speculatively.

He nodded.

"I *was* a rather impulsive young thing," declared Jane.

"Decidedly," responded Strong dryly.

"And, confidentially, Mr. Strong, I still am."

They both laughed.

"Do you remember you swore you'd make me say I was sorry some day?" Jane asked him.

Strong leaned forward, looking into her eyes. "Well—are you?"

"Yes, I am," she said frankly. "Viewing it coolly after eight years, it does seem that I was exceedingly and unnecessarily rude and reckless, and that you acted in a most admirable manner. Do—do you forgive that child of fifteen, Mr. Strong?"

"I did that long ago," said the man, smiling. "But tell me, do you like this sort of thing?"

The girl shrugged. "Not particularly, but it enables one to see one's friends."

"It certainly has its uses. I wouldn't have missed coming here to-night for anything. Ordinarily, I can't understand people's spending these glorious spring evenings in hot, crowded rooms. There's a balcony over there on our left. I'm sure it's cooler. Will you come?"

They passed out onto the balcony, lifted their faces to the soft, fragrant spring air. Both were silent. Jane's violet eyes, turned heavenward, seemed for the moment to reflect the starry sky above them; Strong's gray ones were thoughtful.

But their little moment of quiet was soon interrupted when Peter Esterbrook and Mr. Trevor broke unceremoniously upon them.

"I say, Jane, I—we've been looking for you everywhere," said Peter boyishly. "Trevor says you promised to let him take you home. I say you promised me first. We came to you together to have you settle it."

Jane's dreamy mood changed to one of impishness. Her silvery laughter echoed upon the night. "I haven't the faintest recollection of promising either of you," she said gayly. "But we'll settle it right now if you like." Im-

"We'll settle it right now!" cried the girl, and tossed the rose over the balcony.

pulsively she snatched a rose from her bodice and tossed it over the balcony to the terrace below. "He who brings me that rose takes me home," she announced playfully.

Trevor dashed madly back through the door, a ludicrous little figure. Peter measured with his eyes the distance from the balcony to the ground.

Divining his intention Oliver Strong turned to Jane, and said softly:

"Will you let him climb over the balcony, risking his life to satisfy a foolish whim, to provide you with amusement? You have a light regard for human life, Miss Deering. Esterbrook!" he called imperatively. Peter paused, one leg over the balcony. "Come back! The contest is off! Miss Deering has just promised to let *me* take her home."

Peter paused in his descent, turned questioning eyes upon Jane.

Under Strong's compelling gaze, she nodded faintly. Esterbrook returned to the balcony. "Well, congrats, old man," he said to Strong. "Best man wins. Rather, wisest man wins. Good night, Jane."

"How dare you interfere—again?" Jane turned to Strong with blazing eyes. "How *dare* you?"

"This is the second time, Miss Deering, that you have shown me your light regard for human life. To-night, upon our first meeting for eight years, it has been my pleasure to—shall I say, save you from yourself, from your mad impulsiveness?"

Jane faced him, white with anger, her yellow dress gleaming in the starlight, her pale hands plucking at the ivory sticks of her fan.

"You are unjust," she said hotly, "prejudiced by a childish incident of eight years ago. When I threw the rose over the balcony I had no thought that either of the men would resort to such desperate measures to regain it as Peter seemed for a moment to consider. Even when he started over—you see, I know him better than you do—I didn't believe he meant to go through with it. I don't believe it, now. Your charge is insulting, Mr. Strong, and untrue."

With a disdainful sweep of her whole body Jane turned toward the window.

Strong hurried after her, touched her arm, his gray eyes sincerely regretful.

"I owe you an apology, Miss Deering, a grave apology," he said. "Won't you please forgive me—and may I take you home?"

"Do you presume to think for a moment that, after this, I would allow you to take me home?"

"Then let me escort you to your mother," said Strong more formally.

At this moment Mr. Trevor appeared, blinking a little, while he held a long-stemmed yellow rose toward Jane. "Your flower, Miss Deering. May I hope that——" He held out his arm.

"You may, Mr. Trevor," said Jane. With an icy "Good night" to Strong, she passed with the little man into the crowded drawing-room.

CHAPTER III.

"I HATE HIM!"

"Why so deadly serious to-night, Strong?" asked Peter Esterbrook a few evenings later, when the two men were dining in Oliver's bachelor apartment.

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Oliver, "I'm rather up against it. An old neighbor of mine in Arizona has died and made me guardian to his daughter."

"Kid, I suppose," asked Peter complacently. "Put her in school."

"But she isn't a kid," said Oliver. "She's nearly twenty and an heiress."

"That's equally simple. Marry her," advised Peter naïvely.

"Don't be facetious, Esterbrook," said Oliver seriously. "I want your advice. The girl's on her way East now. Naturally I can't have her here. She's too old for boarding school. What am I to do?"

"Get some impoverished lady of social standing to chaperone her," advised Peter. "If she has money, there are lots of society women who'd jump at the chance."

"Can you suggest any one?"

"What about Mrs. Deering?" asked Peter. "She's an awfully nice person. I know the girl would be happy with her."

"Mrs. Deering?" asked Oliver, amazement in every line of his strong face. "My dear fellow, do you mean to say the Deerings are——"

Peter nodded vehemently. "They've had to let their town house, and their place at Huntingdale is mortgaged up to the hilt. Mrs. Deering has no end of grit; she pretends to like the country only because she can't afford to live in the city. She sends every penny she can to Chris, who spends it on chorus girls."

"And the girl—Jane, what about her?" asked Strong casually.

"She's staying in town at present with Linda Gregory, her cousin," said Peter. "I believe she's going to make an attempt to earn her own living."

Oliver ruminated a moment. "Do you think Mrs. Deering would consent to take a house for the rest of the season and chaperon Miss Ley?"

"I'm sure she would. I'll see her for you if you like," said Peter eagerly.

"Thanks awfully, Esterbrook," said his host. "And remember, there is absolutely no need to spare expense."

So successful were Peter's negotiations that, in little more than a week, Mrs. Blake Deering had acquired a suitable house and was installed therein with Norma Ley, Oliver's attractive young ward.

The whole matter was practically settled before Jane even heard of the project. When she did, at first she was delighted, realizing how much better it would be for Chris to be with his family, and girllike, rejoicing at the thought of having a beautiful home in which to entertain her friends. But when she discovered—as she did just the day before she was to join her mother—that Norma Ley was Oliver Strong's ward, and that it was to him they owed this improvement in their affairs, her indignation

was intense. "He has done it purposely to humiliate me," she told herself furiously.

"Why didn't you tell me that Miss Ley was Mr. Strong's ward?" she asked her mother.

Mrs. Deering looked at her in surprise. "I thought you knew. What difference does it make, dear?"

"It makes all the difference in the world in my plans. I hate the man!"

Mrs. Deering regarded her beautiful daughter with wide, wondering eyes. "You have met Mr. Strong only once. How can you possibly hate him?"

"Well, I do. Oh, mother, won't you give up the idea even now? I can't bear to think we're obligated to him."

"My dear Jane," said her mother with quiet dignity, "I am under no obligation to Mr. Strong. His ward is a very wealthy girl, whom he wants introduced into society. I have undertaken to bring her out. It is purely a business arrangement involving no obligation on either side."

"Well, I can't join you, mother. I have quite made up my mind. It's impossible. I shall stay on here with Linda until I can find employment."

Knowing Jane too well to object, Mrs. Deering reluctantly assented.

But Linda Gregory, who came in just as Mrs. Deering was going and had a few moments private conversation with that lady, did not take Jane's refusal to join her family so quietly.

"What nonsense is this about your not going with your mother, Jane?" she demanded.

Jane looked up rather defiantly. "Well, what about it?"

"Simply this. You know the state of your family exchequer. Don't be a fool and spoil things. The money is Miss Ley's, not Oliver Strong's. This talk of being under obligation to him is all bosh."

"My dear Linda, you are wasting your eloquence." There was something immovable underlying the soft, smooth, girlish voice.

"Well, I think it's particularly selfish of you to act like this," said Linda. "And why do you dislike Mr. Strong? I'm quite serious in saying I'd marry him to-morrow." She looked somewhat disdainfully about the lovely little apartment. "His millions would be most useful to me. Heavens, it's almost four!" She glanced hastily at her wrist watch. "I have an engagement at four-thirty and must change my costume."

As Linda was leaving the apartment a short time later, she ran into Chris, just arriving. "I can't do a thing with her," she said. "Perhaps you'll have better luck."

"I seem to have become very popular with my relatives all at once." Jane smiled as she admitted her brother.

"Don't flatter yourself, dear sister. But you're spoiling all our plans. Look here, Jane. I don't often ask a favor of you. But there's every chance that Strong may give me a lift. If you're going to offend him, it will simply make hash of my hopes."

Jane's fine brows drew together in a disgusted frown. "Why don't you get a job and try to help yourself instead of depending on some one else?" she demanded. "That's what I'm going to do."

"Then you won't come?"

"I can't and won't accept favors from Oliver Strong, not even to help you, Chris. This is final."

Her brother stormed and coaxed. But in the end he left, having failed to swerve Jane from her purpose.

CHAPTER IV.

JANE DEERING, ALIAS JANE DEEN.

A week later, under the name of Jane Deen, Jane Deering secured a position as secretary to a Mrs. Fielding and her daughter. A few days after her arrival at the Fielding country place at Hill-

cliffe, the chauffeur unceremoniously took his departure. Upon discovering that Jane could drive, Mrs. Fielding immediately pressed her into service, and so well did the new secretary perform her duties as chauffeur that her employer, rather pleased with the novel idea, engaged her permanently in this capacity and secured another secretary.

After a week of driving the Fieldings about the country, Jane almost regretted her bargain. But she had the choice of remaining where she was or joining her family, and, in spite of their entreaties, she resolutely determined to stick it out, trying to occupy herself with reading and sketching in her spare time.

Late one glorious spring afternoon, having been told by Mrs. Fielding that she would not be needed again that day, Jane took a camp stool and her sketching materials and started off to climb a hill a short distance away. From a belt of pine trees she suddenly emerged upon a half ruined house, its crumbling roof supported by stone pillars. The hillside rising behind it was now bathed in the flaming glory of the setting sun.

Suddenly, without warning, her work was rudely disturbed.

Jane set to work at once to catch and imprison on canvas some of the appealing loveliness of the spot. She had just sketched in the pillars to her satisfaction when a young tan and white collie came bounding down the slope, and almost before she had time to realize his presence, had sent her sketch flying and very nearly thrown her from her stool. She was on her feet in an instant, but the friendly demonstrations of the dog were so exuberant that she was in danger of being thrown down.

"Naughty boy! Down! Down, I say!" she cried, trying to push the collie's paws from her shoulders. But with every repulse, he leaped up again. Jane's hat had fallen off, her hair was becoming loosened about her face, which was flushed from her exertions, when a man's voice shouted angrily, "Down, Bruno! Down this instant. Here, sir. Here!" The bounding, leaping whirl of canine joy was gone.

The girl sank down exhausted, and turned to view her unknown deliverer, who was in the act of bringing down his cane on the now crouching dog.

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "There is nothing to beat him for!"

With the cane in mid-air the man looked at the girl in surprise. He was a well-set-up young man, of ordinary build and blond coloring. Only his eyes were different. They were of a curious green color, heavy and brooding. He was obviously very angry with the dog.

"He must be taught not to leap at strangers like that. You can't teach a dog without thrashing him."

"I am accustomed to dogs and I disagree with you," said Jane. "Anyway, please don't beat him."

The man smiled, showing even white teeth. "Well, of course, if you make a point of it, I can't refuse."

Jane stooped to pat the dog. "You must learn to have a greater respect for art in future, Bruno," she said laughingly.

"Are you an artist?" asked the stranger.

"No," said Jane, secretly amused, as she tucked her soft hair under her roll-brimmed shade hat. "I'm a chauffeur."

"Oh!" There was a scarcely perceptible change in the newcomer's manner. "You drive for the Fieldings?"

She nodded. "Yes; do you know them?"

"No. But I heard they had a woman driving for them. They like to be a bit different, you know."

"I'm afraid I don't." Jane had gathered her painting equipment together and was folding up her stool as she spoke.

"My name is Frank Winter. I have a little farm near here," volunteered the man. "Won't you let me carry your things home for you? I am going that way."

Jane saw no objection; indeed she was glad of some one to talk to. As they walked slowly back to the cottage where she lived with the gardener and his wife, the talk turned to horses and suddenly Winter said, "If you would like a mount at any time, I have an awfully nice little mare I'd be delighted to let you have."

The girl's eyes shone. "I should love it!" she cried impulsively. Then her face fell. "But I have so little time at my disposal, I'm afraid I shall never get the chance."

"Well, if you should, just let me know and you shall have her. My farm's not far from here on the River Road. But no doubt I shall be along this way soon again."

Jane thanked him and went into the cottage, still amused. Well, at any rate Frank Winter had broken the monotony of her days.

CHAPTER V.

NORMA LEY.

Oliver Strong had a positive sense of responsibility toward Norma Ley, his ward. So a few days after he had left her safe under Mrs. Deering's wing in the Park Avenue house, he felt it his duty to call and see that all was well with her.

He found Norma at the piano in the cheerful morning room, singing a love song, with Christopher Deering as sole audience. Instinctively Strong frowned, but his brow cleared as the girl sprang from her seat and came over to him.

Slender and dainty, with red-brown hair, a perfect complexion, laughing brown eyes, Norma was well worth looking at. And her frank joyous nature made an instant appeal to young and old alike.

"Oliver!" She took both his hands in her little ones. "I'm so glad to see you. I thought you were never coming again."

Oliver smiled. "Well, little girl, I thought I'd give you a few days to get settled. Tell me, what have you been doing?"

"I've been having a lovely time. Chris—Mr. Deering has been taking me about everywhere, and Mrs. Deering has been an angel."

"And—Miss Deering?" Oliver could not refrain from asking.

"Oh, isn't it romantic, Oliver?" Norma bubbled over enthusiastically. "She's driving for some people in the country."

Strong turned questioning eyes to Chris.

"Jane has some queer notions," said that young man. "She went as secretary to some people. The chauffeur left, and since then she's been driving for them." He made the admission sullenly.

It was evident that the subject was both embarrassing and distasteful to him.

"Plucky girl!" was Oliver's only comment.

"Yes, isn't she?" agreed Norma. "I want so much to know her." She turned to Chris and with a little intimate smile said, "Why don't you arrange for us to meet, Chris? You are so clever, surely you can do a simple little thing like that for me."

"I—I'd like to," Chris began, rather disconcerted. "But you see, it's—er—difficult while she's working all the time."

Mrs. Deering entered the room at that moment and nothing further was said on the subject. But when Oliver took his departure, he offered Christopher a lift as far as his club, and put the question that had been on his lips for the past half hour.

"Where is your sister?"

"At Hillcliffe."

Oliver started. "Why I've just bought an estate there," he said. "Who are these people she's with?"

"I believe their name is Fielding," said Chris with a shrug.

"I wonder if I've met them," murmured Oliver half to himself. He was silent for a few moments. Then he turned to his companion. "You must pardon me, Mr. Deering, if I speak plainly," he said; "but Miss Ley is my ward and I feel it my duty to look out for her welfare and happiness. Norma is very young and unsophisticated. I must ask you not to see too much of her."

Chris Deering flushed darkly. Then he said bitterly, "I understand. You've heard things. They're true, no doubt. I've made a rotten mess of my life. I never realized how much it mattered until I met Nor—Miss Ley. She's the most wonderful girl I've ever known. But she's in no danger, I assure you, Strong. She looks upon me as a jolly pal, that's all. Even if she—she's as safe with me as if she were my own sister."

Something frank and straightforward in Chris' manner touched Oliver. "Thank you," he said simply. "I shall feel a lot happier about Norma now. Look upon me as a friend, Deering, and if there's anything I can do for you at any time, let me know, will you?"

The car stopped before the club, and Chris got out.

Oliver waved aside his thanks and called out an order to the chauffeur. Chris stood for a moment staring after the car. "I wish to Heaven I had the nerve to ask his help," he said miserably.

CHAPTER VI.

A THREAT.

The veranda of the Hillcliffe country club presented a gay spectacle this radiant spring afternoon. Women guests, in bright sports costume, sat at little tables sipping cooling drinks from tall glasses while they chattered with their tweed-clad male companions. A short distance away, on the golf links, men and women moved about in enjoyment of a leisurely game. At the back of the club house were congregated motor cars of every description, from the most luxurious to the most modest.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Strong," said Mrs. Fielding effusively, as Oliver strolled past her and her daughter. "Why aren't you playing golf?"

"Oh, how do you do, Mrs.——" He racked his brain.

"Fielding," quickly supplied the lady. Oliver's face instantly lighted. "And I'm sure you remember my daughter Daphne?"

"Oh, certainly," lied Strong. "How do you do, Miss Fielding? Did you drive over?" he then asked unexpectedly.

Mrs. Fielding said graciously that they had. "Dear Mr. Strong, won't you join us for tea on the veranda?" she added.

"Thank you, Mrs. Fielding," replied Strong, rather amused by her eagerness to detain him. "I regret that I cannot take that pleasure now. But may I have tea with you to-morrow—that is, if you will be at home then?"

"Oh yes, Mr. Strong," the woman gushed. "Daphne and I will be very glad indeed to have you with us then. So sorry you cannot stay with us now."

A few minutes later Oliver Strong halted beside the Fielding motor car. He was unaware that Daphne, whose interest he had secured, had left her mother and had strolled along the veranda so that she might keep him in view as long as possible. Now she started, and her sharp eyes gleamed with suspicion and rage as she saw the millionaire raising his hat to her chauffeur.

She would have been astonished could she have heard his conversation with the girl in the car. It began with: "Good afternoon, Miss Deering."

Jane started, the embarrassed color flooding her face. "Please don't call me that. I'm known as Miss Deen here."

Oliver smiled.

It infuriated Jane, that smile. "I might remind you, also," she said with cutting irony, "of a fact of which you seem unaware. In the East, gentlemen of social standing do not, as a rule, engage in conversation with the servants of their friends. That is, in public," she added with malice.

Strong laughed easily. "In the West I left recently, we look upon all work as honorable and all persons engaged in work, however humble, as worthy of respect. I prefer to keep that standard."

Before Jane could reply, Frank Winter suddenly appeared on the other side of the car. "May I bring you an iced drink of some sort, Miss Deen?" he asked, ignoring Strong.

Jane was annoyed with Strong and in her desire to snub him, greeted Winter with unusual warmth. "I'll come with you to get it," she said, alighting as she spoke. Without another word to Oliver, she went off with Winter toward a little tea room a short distance away.

Oliver stood staring after her. In her severely-cut brown coat and knickers with brown leather gaiters and chauffeur's cap, she looked almost like a boy. The memory of that day, eight years ago, when she had tried to ride him down, rushed upon him and caused him to smile.

"Why does she take such pains to snub me if she's entirely indifferent?" he asked himself as he walked slowly back to the club house.

The subject of his thoughts was al-

His smile infuriated her. "Gentlemen do not usually converse with their friends' servants!" she said cuttingly.

ready beginning to repent of having accompanied Winter. Since the adventure with Bruno, Jane had been meeting the young farmer frequently, nor were the meetings entirely by chance. Winter had put the mare of which he had spoken at her disposal, and in the early morning, before the Fieldings were stirring, had accompanied her, with the exuberant Bruno at their heels, on one or two glorious rides. Jane could no longer pretend, even to herself, that Winter's attitude toward her was purely a friendly one.

"Who was that man?" he asked, when they were out of Strong's hearing.

Jane turned sharply. "I don't like your tone. However, it was Oliver Strong."

"Do you mean Strong, the millionaire, who's just bought a place near here?"

"Yes."

"What was he doing talking to you?" asked Winter suspiciously, a dark frown upon his face.

"I met him in the city," said Jane casually.

Winter did not speak again until they were seated in the tea room and their drinks were before them. Then he said, "I don't like your talking to that fellow. A man in his position means no good to a girl in yours."

"Really?" said Jane innocently, looking at him with wide eyes. "Thank you for warning me. But why shouldn't a millionaire marry a poor working girl? I hear it's often done."

"Has he asked you to marry him?" demanded Winter thickly.

"Not yet." The girl burst into a merry laugh.

"And he never will, take my word for it."

"Well, if he doesn't, I'll try to survive it," said Jane mockingly.

Winter reached across the table and seized her hand. "Miss Deen! Jane! Please be serious. If I find that fellow hanging about you again, I'll—I'll——" He left the threat unfinished.

Jane felt a thrill of alarm. She rose quickly from the table.

"Spare yourself the trouble," she said, trying to speak lightly. "He's not in the least likely to worry me. And I can quite take care of myself, thanks. No," —as Winter started to follow her— "don't come. I prefer to go back alone."

Ablaze with jealous anger, Winter's green eyes followed her.

"As soon as you put up the car, Miss Deen, I should like to speak to you," said Mrs. Fielding as she and her daughter alighted and passed up the steps of their home. "There are one or two things I wish to say. I shall be in the morning room."

When Jane entered the appointed room with its bright chintz hangings she found the two ladies seated, awaiting her.

"I saw you speaking to Mr. Strong this afternoon," began Mrs. Fielding. "Such conduct is quite unbecoming to a girl in your position."

Jane managed to refrain from laughing. "Is a girl in my position not to speak to any one?" she asked. There was so much quiet dignity in her attitude that it was impossible to accuse her of impertinence.

"You know quite well what I mean, Miss Deen. It is extremely embarrassing to us to have you seen conversing with our friends."

"But—suppose they happen to be *my* friends, too?" The moment she had spoken the words Jane was furious with herself. Nothing was farther from her intention than to claim Strong as a friend.

"No girl in your position should be seen talking to a gentleman in Mr. Strong's," said Mrs. Fielding severely. "I hope you will not do so again."

Jane smiled icily. "You engaged me as secretary, and later to drive for you,

Mrs. Fielding," she said. "There was no question of your having a right to select my friends. I cannot agree to your restrictions. My choice of friends is my affair. If I am to remain here, we must understand this one point quite clearly."

Anger and amazement rendered Mrs. Fielding dumb. Daphne sprang up angrily, opened her mouth to speak, but at a sign from her mother closed it again. Jane was an excellent driver. Mrs. Fielding did not wish to lose her.

"Is there anything else you wish to say?" Jane asked courteously.

Mrs. Fielding shook her head.

When the door had closed behind her, Daphne Fielding turned to her mother in fury. "Why did you let her talk to you like that? The brazen creature! The idea of her hinting that Mr. Strong was a friend of hers. You must dismiss her at once, mother."

Mrs. Fielding shook her head. "I dare not. You know what a dreadful time we've had keeping a chauffeur. And she's really an excellent driver."

"I'm sure she was lying about Mr. Strong," said Daphne viciously.

"Why not ask him?" said her mother.

So when Strong arrived at the Fieldings the following day, having accepted an invitation to tea in the hope that it might lead to a meeting with Jane, Daphne did so.

"Did she say I was a friend of hers?" asked Oliver eagerly.

"Yes. But of course we didn't believe it."

Oliver stared at her. "Why not?"

Daphne blushed. "Well naturally"—she paused, slightly embarrassed under Strong's direct gaze, then went on—"we thought she was boasting."

"If there were any boasting it would be on the other side," was Oliver's amazing reply.

"You know her family, Mr. Strong?" asked Mrs. Fielding.

"Yes."

"Has that fellow asked you to marry him?" demanded Winter.

"And what sort of people are they?"

"Oh, quite respectable, I assure you," he replied stiffly.

"They're probably servants of his," said Daphne to her mother when he had gone.

As Oliver drove his car past Jane's cottage, he saw her in the tiny garden. She had discarded her boyish chauffeur's suit for a cool white dress and was hatless, her abundant fair hair showing strands of gold in the sunlight. She was tying back a wandering rose spray, and in the poise of her graceful figure, the perfectly balanced motions of hands and arms, the fine setting of the head, there was unmistakable evidence of well-bred ancestry.

"The Fieldings must be blind," murmured Oliver to himself.

He stopped his car and hurried up the gravel walk. Jane heard his footsteps and turned, a look of annoyance coming into her face.

"Good afternoon," said Oliver genially. "May I tie up that rose for you?"

"No, thank you," replied Jane coolly.

Oliver stood, hesitating, in the walk. "Aren't you going to ask me in?" he said. "Surely you don't keep all your friends at such a distance?"

"I have no friends here," she said shortly.

"Pardon me," said the man, his eyes holding hers. "I have just come from the house, where I heard you were good enough to acknowledge me as one."

A sudden wave of color flooded the pale beauty of her face.

"I didn't say you were," she said. "I merely said suppose—— But I was wrong when I said I had *no* friends here. I have *one*. He's coming up the road, now."

Oliver followed her gaze. Frank Winter, followed by Bruno, was striding toward them.

"In that case, I will not detain you," said Strong, and climbing into his car was soon out of sight.

"Strong again, eh?" asked Winter, scowling, the minute he was beside Jane. "What did he want?"

Jane straightened and looked at him indignantly. "Really, Mr. Winter, I cannot see that that is any concern of yours."

"It is every concern of mine," cried Winter angrily. "I told you once before I wouldn't have him hanging around you. I meant it."

Jane faced him, her eyes flashing, dignity and pride in every line of her girlish figure. "Your proprietary attitude would be insulting were it not so ridiculous. Unless you offer me an apology at once, our friendship can no longer continue."

Winter stepped back a pace, almost as if she had struck him.

"Forgive me," he said humbly. "I should not have spoken as I did. But it is for your good. I'm thinking of your position."

Jane laughed shrilly. "My position again!" she said. "Ah well, I must be kept in my proper humble sphere, I know. You'll excuse me, I know, Mr. Winter. I must take out the car, now."

She turned and ran into the house. After staring at the closed door of the cottage a few moments, Winter surlily took himself off. Prematurely concluding that all was well, Bruno leaped upon him affectionately as he strode along the road, and was rewarded by a vicious blow from his master's cane and an angry, "Down, you fool!"

CHAPTER VII.

"MUST YOU HATE ME?"

Jane had motored Mrs. Fielding and Daphne to a friend's house where they were to attend a dance and spend the night. She was driving the car back in the fragrant dusk of the June evening when she decided to take the longer road, which she had not as yet had an opportunity to explore, into Hillside. The drive through the leafy, sweet-smelling lanes was delightful, and when the car emerged onto a wider road, winding around the shoulder of a hill, Jane almost cried out with the beauty of the scene.

But her joy was short-lived. An ominous wheezing, as if the engine had suddenly developed a bronchial cold, brought her back to earth with a crash. A minute or two later the car stopped dead. Jane was out of her seat in an instant. But, though she put every bit of knowledge she possessed into a frantic effort to discover the trouble, the car refused to budge. Her face became smudged, her hands black. She cut her thumb.

Despair descended upon her. There was no house in sight. In taking the unfrequented road she had cut herself off from the help of passing motorists. It looked as if she would have to spend the night where she was.

She wound her handkerchief about her finger. Tears came to her eyes. Then hope revived tremulously in her heart. She heard horses hoofs on the road behind her, and turning, saw a figure on horseback approaching. She stood beside the car and waved frantically to the solitary rider. He saw her, quickened his pace and soon halted beside her.

With a little spasm of anger, Jane recognized Oliver Strong. Why should he, of all men, have to be the one to come to her aid? What a humiliating position!

Strong was off his horse instantly and examining the car. "What on earth brought you on this road alone with the car?" he asked.

"I wanted to explore it."

Strong laughed. "Well, it looks as if you almost had ample opportunity. If I hadn't come along with the same object in view, you might have had to spend the night here. I'm afraid though, I can't put the motor to rights."

"Please don't bother," said Jane stiffly. "I don't mind, in the least, spending the night in this delightful spot." But she did.

"Nonsense!" said the man roughly. Then he came closer. "Good heavens! What have you done to your hand?"

Jane glanced down as he spoke, and suddenly became faint and dizzy. The cut on her thumb was bleeding profusely.

"I—I cut it," she stammered, trying hard to keep control of herself.

"I should say you did. Here, let me see it." Strong's voice became suddenly gentle and sympathetic. Removing her soaked handkerchief from the injured thumb, he rapidly and dexterously bound it up with his own.

Jane submitted without a murmur, her chief concern being that she should not faint.

"Get into the car," said Strong, helping her in. "Here, drink some of this." He held a flask to her lips. "You'll feel better in a moment."

"Thank you," said Jane weakly.

"You must ride my horse home," said Strong. "I'll send a couple of men up here for the car."

"But what will you do?"

"I'll walk."

"I—I couldn't think of taking your horse," said Jane quickly. In the gathering gloom, her face was very white.

Sudden pity for her smote Strong. "Look here, Miss Deering," he said, "Fate has thrown me in your path and it can't be helped. You must accept my aid. Let's be friends to-night. To-morrow you can hate me again as hard as you like."

"We never can be friends," said Jane vehemently.

Strong laughed, but there was a forced note in the laughter. "Perhaps not," he said. "But at least we can be practical. You must ride my horse home."

"I won't. I'll stay here all night."

"Then I'll stay with you."

"I prefer to be alone, thank you."

"Very well," said Strong with a sudden change of tone. "Good night, Miss Deering."

He mounted his horse, and disappeared into the darkness.

Jane stared after him, scarcely able to believe her eyes. She had not thought he would really go. It was beginning to rain. Her hand pained her. She looked about her fearfully. She was afraid. Suddenly she buried her face in her hands and sobbed despairingly.

Then there came a sound that brought with it a spurt of hope. Strong was returning. A moment later he dismounted and stood beside her. "I've come back to ask you again," he said gently. "I've thought of another way. Will you ride before me? Spitfire can easily carry both of us."

Jane's fear of being left alone again on the deserted road overcame her pride.

With a low murmur of assent she stepped from the car.

"Think of me as a dummy for the time being, or anything you like," said Strong as he sprang up behind her and took the reins.

Although Jane tried her best to follow his advice she was painfully aware of his arms about her, of the strong shoulders just back of her. At first she sat as stiffly erect as she could, but the horse's first stumble sent her against the man. After a time she ceased to hold herself aloof. In silence, they covered the distance to Hillcliffe.

When they reached the Fieldings' place and were before the gardener's cottage, Strong was off the horse and on the road before the girl could move. With infinite gentleness he lifted her down. "Don't worry about the car," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "I'll see that it is brought down safely." Then, so softly that she could hardly catch the words, he added, "Must you hate me, Jane?"

Must she? Jane lifted wide violet eyes to his. Then, without answering, fled from him up the path toward the cottage. When she reached the porch, she stopped and called back, "Thank you very much. Good night."

Deep in thought, Strong rode slowly along the road to his place, Rock Crest. When he had gone some distance, he was aroused from his reverie by the sound of loud talking and laughter proceeding from a house on his right. The fine old mansion, which Strong recognized as that of a rich and rather profligate young clubman, was brilliantly lit, and he could see through the open windows women and men in gala attire moving about inside. The owner of the house was entertaining some theatrical friends.

In silence they rode back, Jane and the man she hated.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. KINGSLEY'S PEARLS.

Oliver was at breakfast the next morning when he was informed that Mr. Christopher Deering would like to see him immediately. Surmising by the earliness of the call that something was wrong, he hurried to the library, where his caller was waiting.

Chris' face was pale; there were great black circles under his eyes. He had the haggard appearance of one who has not slept for several nights.

The two men exchanged greetings.

"You told me once that if I was in need of a friend to come to you," said Chris, plunging into the heart of the matter. "Did you mean that?"

"I don't say things I don't mean," said the other. "What's wrong?"

"Everything." Chris spoke jerkily, as if the words were wrung from him by some inexorable force. "I may be arrested at any moment."

"Arrested?" said Oliver, thoroughly taken aback. "For what?"

"Did you read the morning papers? Did you see this?" Chris snatched a paper from his pocket, opened it and, holding it in front of Oliver, pointed to a headline:

STRING OF PEARLS WORTH ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS STOLEN FROM MRS. MARTIN KINGSLEY.

"Well, what of it?" said Oliver. "What's that got to do with you?"

"I—I stole them," Chris admitted desperately. "I thought Mrs. Kingsley wouldn't notify the police; I thought she would rather lose the pearls than have any newspaper notoriety because then all her guests would be under suspicion, and that would reflect on her as a hostess. So—so I took them. And now she has gone to the police. I—I don't know what to do. I——"

"Were you mad to do a thing like that?" demanded the other, interrupting him. "To commit an act you knew would bring certain disgrace on your family?" Thinking of Jane, he went on sharply, "Does any one know of this?"

"Cecile."

"Cecile?"

"Cecile St. Cloud."

"Oh, yes." Oliver remembered certain rumors. "Chorus girl, isn't she? Why, in Heaven's name, did you tell her?"

A maddening pause, and then, "She is—my wife."

"Your wife?"

Chris nodded feebly.

Strong's mind began working rapidly, planning, weighing up, rejecting all sorts of schemes to save from utter ruin this boy whose friend he had promised to be.

"Where are the pearls?" he asked shortly.

"I—I gave them to Cecile."

Oliver stared at him, a light beginning to dawn. "You mean that she herself took them. You are shielding her."

Chris Deering's look of misery did not change. Beyond an involuntary start, he gave no sign of surprise or relief. He only repeated monotonously, "I gave them to Cecile."

Oliver knew, now, that Chris was lying to save his wife. He was a silly young fool, but he was not a thief. Yet the need for action was as acute as ever.

"Pull yourself together, Deering," he said sternly. His guest had slumped down in a chair, his head in his hands. "We may be able still to save the situation if we are prompt. The necklace must be returned and—what sort of woman is Mrs. Kingsley?"

"Awfully nice sort but a climber," said Chris laconically. "Making desperate efforts to get into society."

"Right," said Oliver. "We can manage her easily. But first, you must get the pearls from Cecile."

Deering winced. "She—she has pawned them."

"In your name, I suppose," said Oliver. "If I advance the necessary amount to redeem them, won't she relinquish the ticket?"

"She won't even see me."

"Won't see you?" asked Strong amazed. "But I thought——"

"She's left me."

"Do you know where she is?"

"She's at a house party being given by a young clubman for some theatrical people. His place is not far from here."

Oliver remembered the house he had passed the night before, the loud laughter and chatter. "Yes, I know where it is. Leave her to me. And your people must meet Mrs. Kingsley."

"I can't ask them to do that," objected Deering.

"Do you want my help?" demanded Oliver. Deering's appealing look gave him no room for doubt. "Then you'll do as I advise. You'd better remain here for the present. I'll see what I can do."

Ordering his car, Oliver motored over

to the scene of last night's festivity and called upon Cecile St. Cloud. Cecile, a small, overdressed, bejeweled person with brilliant bobbed hair, was immensely flattered by the sudden appearance of the millionaire, who she had already heard had a large estate at Hillcliffe. She promptly and hopefully accorded him the private interview for which he asked. Oliver had to admit that she possessed a certain attraction. But he knew that, beneath her soft babyish exterior, she was hard as iron.

"I have called to talk to you about Christopher Deering," were his first words.

A quick change came over Cecile's dainty features. Her smile vanished and an ugly frown took its place. How much did this man know? She decided not to commit herself, at any rate. "Yes?" she asked casually.

"About those pearls——" began Oliver coolly.

"Pearls? What pearls, may I ask?" said Cecile, bristling.

"Come, come, Miss St. Cloud," continued Strong. "I happen to know that——"

"So you have come from that fool Deering? Well, he's got himself into a beastly mess, and he can get himself out. I'm not going to help him."

"You mean you've got him into a beastly mess. There's no use stalling. I know you stole Mrs. Kingsley's pearls and pawned them. I'll trouble you for the ticket."

Cecile paled under her rouge, but her nerve never left her. "And suppose I refuse?" she asked insolently.

"I shall feel obliged to notify the police at once."

Oliver left with the pawn ticket in his pocket and Cecile St. Cloud as his bitter enemy. He motored into the city, recovered the pearls and returned them to Mrs. Kingsley. With a convincing tale of a wager taken up by Chris in a youthful frolic and carried too far, he pacified her, and sat by her while she wrote the police and the newspapers that the pearls really had never been lost. Then he rewarded her with an invitation to a dazzling house party at Rock Crest. He mentioned casually that among the guests would be Mrs. Deering, Mrs. Gordon Esterbrook and her son, Peter, Mrs. Gregory, and Norma Ley, his ward.

Mrs. Kingsley was in the seventh heaven of delight. She would have suffered gladly the loss of the pearls for the wonderful good fortune their temporary disappearance had brought her.

With Mrs. Deering, Oliver had little difficulty, assuring her that it was for Chris' sake he was asking her, with Norma, to Rock Crest to meet Mrs. Kingsley. Peter Esterbrook, who suspected Chris' plight, managed matters with his mother. Mrs. Gregory required no engineering.

The middle of June saw them all assembled at Rock Crest, and the Fieldings, amazed at the brilliance of Strong's party, waited in a state of feverish anxiety for an invitation to join in the festivities. But the days went by, and they were not included among the guests.

CHAPTER IX.

WINTER'S REVENGE.

Oliver had written to Jane, asking her if she would not give up her work with the Fieldings and become one of the house party. She had ignored his note, but a chance meeting late one afternoon gave him an opportunity of asking her to reconsider.

Daphne Fielding, who had learned to drive, had taken the car out, and Jane had wandered along the cliff to watch the sunset. Oliver, craving an hour alone with his thoughts, was riding along the road on Spitfire, when he saw her. He was off his horse and striding up to her before Jane had time to decide whether or not she would speak to

him. He waited for no such courtesy.

"I hope you have been thinking over what I said to you in my note," he said eagerly.

In spite of her antagonism toward him, Jane had to admit that he looked well in his brown suit, and that the expression in his deep-set gray eyes, as they looked into hers, gave her a faint thrill.

But she hid her thoughts, regarding Oliver with a mocking smile from under her soft-brimmed hat. "I have thought it over and made my decision," she said. "You can fill your house with as many of my relations and friends as you like but I shall continue my work."

Oliver stood regarding her coolly. "That is impossible," he retorted. "You will no longer be able to masquerade as Miss Deen. It will be awkward for every one."

"You have brought my people here on purpose to humiliate me," Jane cried furiously. "But you can do your worst. Nothing will induce me to leave the Fieldings."

Oliver wondered what she would say if she knew the real reason for the Rock Crest house party. "On the other hand," he said, "I could easily induce you. However——"

Infuriated, yet thrilled by his masterful tone, Jane rose, her light summer dress fluttering in the breeze. With her head high, she climbed down the great rock on which she sat and started to pass him. But unfortunately in her effort to be haughty, she did not choose her way carefully. Her foot slipped on a small stone, and she would have fallen had not Oliver's strong arms caught and held her fast.

"Why do you pretend to hate me, Jane?" he asked softly, as he held her, flushed and breathless, a prisoner. Swiftly he bent and kissed her full on the lips. Then he opened his arms, and half sobbing, she fled away from him toward the road.

"You are trying to humiliate me," she said furiously, "but do your worst!"

She knew the truth, now—she knew she did not hate Strong. She loved him. It had been love all the time, love masquerading as hate. Her stubborn, rebellious pride would not let her admit it. She touched her lips gently with her fingers. Oliver Strong had kissed her. Her heart singing, she ran home swiftly.

Suddenly, there came a sound that brought her to an abrupt standstill. It was a sharp report, as of a pistol shot. Could Strong have—— Wild thoughts flitted through the girl's head. She turned and sped back to the spot where she had parted from Oliver only a moment ago. The cliff was deserted. There was no one about. His horse was gone.

"I must have been mistaken," said Jane. Rather sobered, she walked back to the gardener's cottage in the deepening dusk.

He staggered on the verge of destruction, and the rock gave way beneath his feet.

Oliver had watched Jane out of sight, a rueful smile on his lips. Then climbing to the rock which she had just vacated, he sat thinking. His thoughts were rudely interrupted.

"You shall reckon with me for this, Oliver Strong," said a hoarse voice, and Frank Winter stepped from behind a neighboring ledge where he had been hiding. His green eyes were ablaze with jealousy and hatred.

Strong looked at him, too surprised to speak. And, indeed, Winter gave him no chance. "Ever since you came here you have been pursuing with unwelcome attentions the girl I intend to make my wife. You have been dangling your damned wealth before her eyes, and trying to tempt her with it." His words came in a rushing torrent, his breath in uneven gasps. "And now to-day you—you *kissed* her!" Winter fairly hissed the words. Climbing to the rock beside Oliver, he rudely grasped Strong's shoulder.

But Oliver quickly shook himself free, and rose. "If Miss Deer—Deen is engaged to you, I apologize," he said. "If not, you're damned presuming."

"I warned her if I caught you hanging around her again I'd——" continued Winter wildly.

With an impatient gesture, Oliver started down the rock. Then something struck him violently in the left arm, making him stagger backward. At the same time, a shot rang out. He turned to see Winter, revolver in hand, glaring at him through a little wreath of smoke.

Oliver rushed upon him to wrest the pistol from his hand. His left arm, bleeding and shattered, hung helpless at his side. With the other arm outstretched, he already had his fingers on the revolver when Winter ducked, and with all the strength of his powerful shoulders drove his full weight against the wounded man. Oliver spun around, made a wild clutch at his assailant, staggered on the crumbling edge of the cliff and righted himself for a second on the very verge of destruction; but before he could take the one step which would have kept him in safety, the rock gave way beneath his feet. With a sickening clatter of pebbles, he disappeared.

Winter, suddenly sobered, stood staring stupidly at the spot where a second before his antagonist had been. An awful stillness that seemed to clutch at his heart, reigned all about him; not a sound was to be heard. Like a hunted man he turned and slunk from the spot, unsuspecting that from the very rock behind which he had hidden and watched Oliver and Jane, another now watched him.

Chris Deering nervously paced up and down the terrace at Rock Crest. Cecile

St. Cloud's presence in Hillcliffe caused him hourly uneasiness. One could never tell what Cecile was plotting. He repented with his whole soul the folly that had caused him to make her his wife.

The coming of Norma Ley into his life had changed his whole scheme of things, had given him a glimpse of the paradise he might have entered had it not been for his reckless act. Her pure straightforward friendship, Chris felt, was like an oasis in the parched desert of his ruined existence. Had he been free, he might have had a chance of making that friendship something deeper and closer. But he was not free. There was Cecile. A year ago he had secretly married her, to repent the act before a week had passed.

When Cecile learned the true state of Chris' finances she promptly left him, but, knowing his desire to keep the marriage a secret from his people, she did not hesitate to use it as a means of extracting money from him. This proving insufficient to satisfy her demands for luxury, she had yielded to sudden temptation on finding herself alone in Mrs. Kingsley's boudoir one day, and had taken the pearls. Having done so, she immediately raised money on them in Chris' name and defied him to do his worst.

Thanks to Oliver Strong's generosity, disgrace had been averted from the young man. But Chris felt no assurance that Cecile might not again do something scandalous and shift the responsibility for her act to him. Despair of ever freeing himself was rapidly getting hold of him. He could not ask Oliver to help him again.

Thinking of Oliver, he began to wonder why his host was so late. The crimson and gold had faded from the sky; the twilight was falling rapidly. Peter Esterbrook and Norma Ley had gone rowing, but he had felt too moody and depressed to join them.

He glanced along the tree-lined avenue that wound from below the terrace to the entrance gates, and at the extreme end something dark loomed into view beneath the shadow of the arching branches. A moment later, the echo of clattering hoofs came to his ears.

The sound of the galloping horse brought Mrs. Deering from the drawing-room. "Mr. Strong at last!" she exclaimed, slipping her arm through Chris'. "He's riding very fast, isn't he?"

"Extraordinarily so, for the end of the day. I'll go and meet him."

He descended the wide stone steps leading to the graveled space before the door, hurrying a little. A belt of shrubs below the terrace hid the avenue from view, but as he gained the entrance, Chris gave vent to a cry of dismay. "Great heavens! The horse is riderless!"

Covered with mud and drenched with sweat, with empty saddle and dangling stirrups, Spitfire sped past him like a flash and clattered under the archway into the stable yard.

CHAPTER X.

THE SEARCH.

"Miss Deen!"

Jane opened the door of the little cottage and came out on the tiny porch as Mrs. Nelson, the gardener's wife, ran up the path.

"Mr. Strong's horse just went home with empty saddle," said Mrs. Nelson breathlessly. "They think Mr. Strong's been killed. They want my Jim to join in the searching party."

"Killed!" Dazed, Jane echoed the words. Killed! With his kiss still burning her lips. Then it *had* been a shot she heard when she ran back. But who had fired it? Strong? Who?

"I—I must see if there's anything I can do to help!" she cried wildly. She ran past Mrs. Nelson, down the path and out into the road, a gnawing anxiety

devouring her, turning her very heart to water. She found herself saying over and over, "Oh, God, don't let him be dead. Don't let him be dead!"

Night had fallen. The sky was scattered with stars, and a pale moon had risen. Jane stumbling on, scarcely aware of where she was going, suddenly saw a light bobbing up and down in the road ahead of her. She hurried toward it to find that it was a lantern carried by one of the searchers. "Have you seen——" The man began to speak.

Suddenly Jane cried, "Chris!"

"Jane! You've heard that Strong is missing? I'm almost mad with anxiety. No one in all the world has ever been the friend to me that he has."

Jane looked at him, a growing dread and fear of she knew not what in her heart. "Wh-what do you mean?" she stammered.

"If it wasn't for Strong, I'd be in jail now," said Chris, now unrestrained. In a few words he told her about the pearls, omitting the part Cecile St. Cloud had played in the sordid affair.

"And I refused him a simple request," said Jane in a whisper. All the life seemed to have ebbed from her. Her knees were shaking under her. Earth and sky merged together in a mocking dance.

"So you see I owe him more than life —my freedom; and if anything has happened to him——" The searcher was gone, his lantern shining here and there in the darkness like a glowworm.

Jane hurried blindly on, her mind torn and rent with the conflict of emotion that surged within her. Suddenly she found herself sharply descending. Instinctively she flung out her hands. A second later she realized that she had stumbled on a precipitous path running at an angle across the rugged face of the cliff to a tiny stretch of shore at the base. In the daytime she would scarcely have trusted herself on so sheer a descent, but the thought of bodily danger did not penetrate the confusion of her mind at the moment.

Oliver Strong had saved her brother, her whole family, herself, from a disgrace that would have bowed them to the earth, and she had treated him with shameless inconsideration. And now he might be—— No! She would not let herself think it.

At last she was on firm ground again, on a tiny stretch of shore at the foot of the cliff. It was a solitary spot. She shivered and looked about her. Before her was the river, behind her, the cliff. On the right—— What was that? Something white gleamed in the moonlight. She hurried toward it. A man's shirt front! Could it be? Uttering a cry, she sank on her knees beside the huddled, unconscious figure of Oliver Strong.

Was he dead? Her heart seemed to stand still with fear. She forced herself to feel his pulse. He moaned faintly. "Thank God!" Jane murmured. Moistening her handkerchief, she gently bathed his brow. "Mr. Strong! Oliver!" she cried. "Speak to me!" But there came only the mocking echo of her own voice. What could she do? Chris and his party seemed to be searching in another direction. She could not lift Strong, and even if she could, where could she take him? Despair seized her; a sob burst from her.

All at once she became aware that the man had opened his eyes. A glow of gratitude suffused her heart and fought with the creeping fear there. She brought her lips close to his face and whispered, "Do you know me? It is I, Jane."

Oliver's lips seemed to form the word "Jane," but no sound escaped them. He tried to move and the effort wrung a groan from him.

"I'm going to shout for help," said Jane in a half whisper. "You won't be startled, will you?" She put her arms about his shoulders, leaning his head

against her, and held him as if he were a child. Then her voice called into the night.

"Chris! Chris! Come! I've found him!"

It seemed an eternity that she sat there, afraid to move lest a change of position hurt the injured man. She was hoarse with shouting. Oliver gave no sign of consciousness now, no recognition of her presence. Had he died in her arms?

Suddenly, there came the swish of oars. With a sigh of thankfulness Jane saw a rowboat, in which were a man and a girl, making swiftly past the shore. Gently placing Oliver back upon the sand, she rose, and with a last spurt of strength, shouted and waved.

A few moments later Peter Esterbrook and Norma Ley scrambled to her side. They had heard her cries and, in alarm, put in to shore.

"Jane!" exclaimed Esterbrook when he saw her. "What are you doing here? What has happened?"

Briefly she told him, then rendered what assistance she could in getting Strong into the boat.

"Hurry!" said Peter. "There's a storm coming up. We've got to row like the devil to Rock Crest. Strong must have medical attention without delay."

Jane stepped into the boat and took the second pair of oars. She and Peter began to row furiously.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STORM.

When Frank Winter, filled with panic at what he had done, crept, white and trembling, from the cliff, his one thought was flight. But he had gone only a little way when another thought, swift and paralyzing, supplanted the first. In his haste, he had forgotten the revolver. It still lay upon the rock where in the scuffle it had fallen. He must return and get it before it could be found.

Suppose some one had heard the shot and already had hurried to the scene of the tragedy? With the utmost stealth and caution, he crept back toward the cliff. Would he be in time? There came a sound that made him tremble with terror—the crackling of twigs in the bushes on his right. He turned to flee. As he did so, a young woman stepped before him, a young woman with brilliant red hair, bobbed and elaborately curled. She was wearing a frilly afternoon dress and a fluffy cape.

"I want to go back!" sobbed the woman, but he paddled on relentlessly into the very teeth of the storm.

"Lose something?" she drawled in slow, velvety tones that held a hint of hardness.

"N-no," stammered Winter desperately.

From beneath the draperies of her filmy wrap, Cecile St. Cloud drew a revolver and held it out to him. "This, I think, is yours."

Winter looked at her with wild eyes, then faced her defiantly. "Well, what if it is?"

"Nothing; except I happened to see you shoot Oliver Strong with it. I saw what followed, too."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Winter. "What—what was Oliver Strong to you?"

"An enemy," said Cecile calmly. "A spy. He thwarted me, too. That is why"—she eyed Winter shrewdly—"I am going to help you."

She saw that fear was again the uppermost expression on his changing face, and added, "It would be horrid to be locked up in weather like this, don't you think?" Cecile gave a little shiver and glanced at him from under her wonderful, long lashes. "Listen to me. I'll be frank. I need money. You need my help. I've a canoe at my disposal. For a consideration, say, five hundred—darn cheap at that price, too—I'll let you have the canoe to get to the other side of the river and make a safe get-away. I'll go with you and row the boat back to this side to cover up any traces of your escape. What do you say?"

What could Winter say? What did he say? "Yes."

Carefully, the two confederates made their way from the spot and down to the shore where the canoe was tied.

A cool, brisk breeze had begun to blow from the west as Frank Winter and Cecile St. Cloud started across the river. Twilight had deepened to darkness. A moon had risen, but fast-moving clouds obscured its face every few minutes.

Winter paddled smoothly; the frail craft seemed to leap ahead under his powerful strokes. Both the man and his companion were silent. He was thinking of the wounded man whom, in a jealous rage, he had hurled over the cliff and left for death to claim; Cecile St. Cloud was thinking with fear that she was now an accessory to her companion's crime. But there was the money. She would do anything for money—and she hated Strong. With a shrug of her shoulders she put unpleasant thoughts from her mind and looked across the water.

Whitecaps on the waves! Had Winter noticed them? She glanced at him. His brows were lowering, his lips compressed, his eyes set on the still distant farthest shore. Then a heavy cloud blotted out the moon.

"Winter," the woman called out, in alarm, "a storm is coming! The moon is gone, and just look at the waves!"

"Eh?" ejaculated Winter. He gazed up at the sky; a few stars still showed in the east, but the west was black as midnight. "Yes, yes. Sit down in the bottom of the canoe," he said.

There came an ominous rumbling of thunder as Cecile St. Cloud lowered herself cautiously to the floor of the canoe.

"We must hurry," the man went on. "Be careful, Miss St. Cloud. Keep quiet. Stay still now, where you are. Don't lean to the side. There! We've got to go fast."

He redoubled his efforts, but he was pulling straight into the storm. It was difficult to keep the canoe headed for the shore. More and more threateningly growled the thunder, as the storm drew near. There was blackness overhead, blackness all about the two on the water.

"I want to go back," Cecile whimpered. "We must go back."

"You know I can't turn back," the man growled; "so keep quiet. You'll get your money. But you'll have to

wait till the storm is over to take back the canoe."

"I want to go back; I want to go back," the woman half sobbed, as a spray splashed over the frail craft.

Winter did not reply. He paddled silently, gloomily.

Then there came a louder crash, as though the skies had been rent; a strange hissing noise skimmed over the water. An instant later, the thunder squall was upon them. Furiously the rain smote them and the gale turned the canoe broadside to the waves. Winter and Cecile St. Cloud were struggling in the black water.

The adventuress screamed shrilly as the boat was overturned and swept past her. Winter called to the woman and struggled to reach her. He grasped her dress, held fast, and shouted to her to be still and he would bring her safe to shore. But Cecile St. Cloud could not swim. Now in a panic of fear, she threw her arms about the man's neck. In vain he strove to loosen her hold.

Ten minutes later the moon was shining down again upon the beautiful river. The waters were still white-capped, but the wind had gone down. A broken paddle and a canoe, floating bottom upward, drifted slowly downstream with the tide, which swept seaward the guilty man and woman, now calm in death.

CHAPTER XII.

THE UNMASKING.

Jane Deering awoke the morning following her rescue of Strong to find herself in a strange room. A broad streak of sunlight stretched across the floor; a breeze ruffled the dainty curtains at the windows.

She sat up in bed, dazed at first. Why was she not in her own little room at the Nelson's cottage? Then the events of last night came back to her with a shock. She realized that she was at Rock Crest, Oliver Strong's house.

And Strong? How was he? She must find out at once. As she placed two bare, pink feet on the floor, there came a knock at the door. Her mother entered.

"Well, Jane, dear brave girl, how do you feel this morning?" Mrs. Deering placed her arm affectionately about her daughter and kissed her cheek.

"Perfectly well, thanks, mother. How —how is Mr. Strong?" To her dismay Jane was conscious that she was blushing.

"Doing very nicely, considering. It was really miraculous that he wasn't killed. By the way, two persons *were* killed last night—drowned. They were out rowing in the storm you just missed."

"Who are they?"

"No one we knew. A farmer named Winter and a Miss St. Cloud, an actress." Mrs. Deering rose, hesitated, then came back and sat down beside Jane. "Dear, you will let me send Mrs. Fielding a note that you will be unable to return, won't you?" she said with a note of entreaty in her voice.

She had expected a refusal, but to her amazement Jane meekly agreed. Puzzled, yet pleased, Mrs. Deering left the room.

Weak and trembling, Jane sat on the side of the bed for a long time after her mother left her. Finally she bathed and dressed and passed from the room down the corridor. Through a door just across the hall a trained nurse came, softly closing it behind her. Jane waited until she had vanished down a stairway, then she turned the handle and went inside.

Oliver Strong lay quietly in his bed, a mass of bandages. His eyes were open, but he thought he must be dreaming. Then, from the vision in the doorway, came in full clear notes, velvety soft:

"I—I have come to ask you to forgive me. Chris has told me all you did for him."

"Would you mind coming closer?" asked the injured man.

Tremulously Jane moved across the room and sank into a chair beside him.

"What I did for Chris is nothing," said Oliver, "to what you did for me last night. You saved my life."

"Please don't speak of that," faltered the girl.

"But I must. And there's something else. I want you to know that I—I won't bring any charge against Frank Winter."

Jane started. Then it was Winter who shot him and pushed him over the cliff? Well, the deed was avenged.

"There is no need," she said gently. "He was drowned last night, trying to get away. There was a girl with him, an actress, Miss St. Cloud."

It was Oliver's turn to start. Chris was free! But what of Jane?

"I—I'm sorry about Winter," he said. "You—you loved him, didn't you?"

Jane bent her head humbly. "No, I didn't love him," she murmured.

Strong closed his eyes, and for some time was so still that Jane thought he had fallen asleep. She was about to creep from the room when he stretched out his hand and his gray eyes upon her, asked, "And—do you still hate me?"

A scarlet flush swept Jane's face; the tears brimmed over in her eyes. With a little cry of surrender, she rose from her chair and knelt beside the bed.

"It was never hate," she whispered softly. "Never."

Strong turned to her, his face suddenly transfigured. "Then it was——"

"Love," said Jane, her lips very close to his. "Love masquerading."

The door opened very softly. But neither the man in the bed nor the girl kneeling beside him, heard. Christopher Deering stood in the doorway, a little embarrassed, decidedly pleased. He had come to tell Oliver that he would accept that position on his ranch—the one out West he had offered him last week. He was free. In a year, if he made good, he would come back and claim Norma.

Smiling a benediction on the lovers, he withdrew and softly closed the door.

BEWITCHED

THIN wisp of moon, over the hill's shoulder,
Tempting my feet to leave the road at night!
Pale, witching moon, with coy face growing bolder,
Spying upon me as a fairy might!

By the spring's edge, drinking of desire,
Lips that are loving burn upon my own;
Lips that I've lost thrill me with their fire,
Till I remember that I am alone.

Dear, every trail wheresoe'er I ramble,
Leads me, it seems, to glens where you should be;
And the young moon, peering through the bramble,
Laughs at my dreams and makes a mock of me!

JAMES OWEN TRYON.

A Little Fire Pot

Illustrations by A.W. Sperry

by Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith

BEAUTIFUL! They are almost devilishly beautiful!" Andrew Silver let the great rope of emeralds, huge blocks of green fire, slide through his fingers. They dyed his palms with their jealous glow.

"Beautiful!" Monsieur Moncrief, the old French lawyer, gestured as if Andrew Silver had blasphemed against the lovely baubles. Monsieur was a dapper little man with an artfully waxed mustache and delicate, pink-tipped old hands continually raised in voluble gesticulation. Silver was convinced that without his hands the little *avocat* would be hopelessly tongue-tied.

"Beautiful! Monsieur!" he continued. "The—the—Dutoile emeralds are *magnifique, superbe,* what you say, beyond the power of language! They have been the toast of France for centuries; there are no finer gems in the world. An old king made of them a gift to a former Duchesse Dutoile. They were the prize he had wrested from heathen hordes in Africa, the pride of the family for generations. Ah, it cuts me like a knife that I should live to see the duchesse brought to such an extremity where it becomes necessary for her to part with the chiefest treasure of all her inheritance!"

The old lawyer blew his nose violently.

"Nothing—nothing but direst necessity," he went on, "could induce Toinette, Duchesse Dutoile, to part with these priceless gems. Oh, monsieur, you can not dream how it grieves me to see the family I have served, the family my father served before me, and my father's father, reduced to such a state. I am ravished when I think on the straits in which the duchesse labors." His dim old eyes filled with tears; his thin, waspish shoulders quivered. "The emeralds—they are her last hope. The estate—it has been dissipated. Nothing remains except the land, poverty-stricken, mortgage-ridden, and the emeralds. Were she not practically starving, no sum, however princely, could part her from the emeralds, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—*"c'est la vie.* She must submit. The emeralds, her precious emeralds, are for barter."

Andrew Silver, who, rather bored, soon discovered that, however shattered Monsieur Moncrief's nervous system might be by the impending loss of the emeralds, he was not so grieved that he could not drive a hard bargain for the great gems. But at length the transaction was completed, the terms arranged. A king's ransom would be exchanged for the kingly jewels.

"I shall return to-morrow at noon with exchange," said Andrew. "The deal can be consummated at that time, I dare say."

"Vraiment," affirmed the old lawyer, whose spirits had been completely restored by the bargain he had driven. "The emeralds will be here for you; that is"—he smiled facetiously—"unless Mimi, the Apache, accomplishes her threat."

"Mimi, the Apache?" echoed the young man blankly.

"A notorious woman criminal, though they say she is little more than a girl. For better than two years, monsieur, she has terrorized us over here. She is a daring, fearless creature, the head of a gang of cutthroats and thieves, the despair of the *gendarmerie,* although"—Monsieur Moncrief shrugged his expressive shoulders—"that is not hard to be—the *police,* they are so stupeed! She mocks them, makes light of them, steals from under their very nose, and has the audacity to leave her card behind with her name written in a fine delicate hand on exquisite linen parchment. Is it not droll?"

The lawyer paused dramatically for a moment, then continued. "She has sworn by her honor—there *is* honor among thieves, *n'est-ce pas?*—to have the Dutoile emeralds; boldly she claims them as her own. Twice has she attempted to steal them, to be defeated by mere chance. Once the emeralds had been removed, less than an hour before her arrival, from the duchesse's country home to a wall safe in her city house. Again, chance intervened. The duchesse, having worn the necklace to a ball, reluctantly yielded to my entreaties and at the last minute consented to dispatch the jewels by special messenger directly from the ball to the safety vault.

"On the way home the duchesse's limousine was halted, and she was forced to submit to an ignominious search by the determined woman bandit, who was highly infuriated at missing the emeralds. The affair has touched the Apache's honor to the quick and not less than a week ago there was a letter in the duchesse's morning mail, written in a fine and delicate hand on exquisite linen parchment, declaring that the duchesse would never reap vulgar American gold—I ask your pardon, sir—off her famous green glass while Mimi, the Apache, retained her skill and daring."

Andrew Silver, who had paid but scant heed to all this voluble romancing, soon took his departure. The whole affair cut more or less into his grain. Even the emeralds, unrivaled jewels as they were, did not prepossess him. As he sauntered along the boulevard toward his hotel he realized that the whole mission was distinctly disagreeable and tedious.

Andrew Silver was a wealthy, well-born young American of Scotch-Irish descent, with thick, dark hair, canny gray eyes and an Irish lilt to his lips when he smiled. A deeply cleft chin relieved what might otherwise have been a formidable profile.

Almost from the days of their perambulators, Andrew had been engaged to Sylvia Evart. Their two estates adjoined. The match, planned when the parents were living, was consummated after the boy and girl, left orphaned with far more money than was good for their souls, were old enough to know better.

Sylvia was beautiful. She was a lovely, imperious creature, although woefully spoiled; but then, what great heiress of unusual beauty is not? Moreover, she was absurdly set on having her own way even down to the last notch.

And Sylvia felt none the less footfree because she was bound by her promise to Andrew. After their engagement, she continued to coquette on as grand a scale as ever. Year after year she put Andrew off, deferred their wedding day and kept him dangling helplessly about while she flirted with every man that came her way.

The duchesse and her chauffeur quailed at the point of the Apache's gun.

At length, however, Andrew's patience was exhausted. There came a time when he announced with a bulldog clamp of his Scotch jaw and a total absence of his Irish smile, that he was at the end of his tether. Sylvia *must* stop her trifling. She must name the day. And Sylvia, who had no intention of losing Andrew—she might play lesser fry for the sport of it but Andrew was the game fish on her line—Sylvia announced her ultimatum.

She had seen in the papers where the famous Dutoile emeralds were to be sold in Paris the following week to the highest bidder, so with the perversity of the spoiled coquette, Sylvia promised that if Andrew would bring them to her to wear on her wedding day, she would marry him immediately. And he, albeit none too pleased by her bargaining with him but anxious to have the thing settled and over with, hurried off to Paris by the first steamer.

II.

Early the next morning after his interview with Monsieur Moncrief, Andrew was awakened in his suite at the hotel by the continued ringing of his telephone bell. When he had collected his sleep-drowsy senses sufficiently to manipulate the queer foreign instrument which Americans seem never to master, he recognized with a start the quavering voice of old Monsieur Moncrief incoherent with many *"Mon Dieu's"* and *"Le diable's."*

"Oh, monsieur!" panted the wavering old voice. "Oh, monsieur, the emeralds! The duchesse! So foolhardy! Why did she insist on keeping them by her last night? So reckless! But I warned her, monsieur."

"What is it? I don't understand." cried Andrew, vainly seeking to stem the tide of the lawyer's hysteria.

"The emeralds! Oh, monsieur, the duchesse!" The young man groaned. There was no making head or tail of the plaintive cries. "The *gendarmerie,* so stupeed! The dolts; the donkeys! They know nothing; they do nothing! Oh, what shall we do; what shall we do?"

Again Andrew sought enlightenment.

"What has happened?" he demanded impatiently. "I don't understand. What has happened?"

But Monsieur Moncrief was off again. At length in sheer desperation Andrew put the telephone back on the

stand and sallied out after the morning papers. There in glaring headlines he found what he sought:

DUTOILE EMERALDS STOLEN.

THE APACHE MIMI MAKES GOOD HER THREAT.

After two unsuccessful attempts the Apache, Mimi, has at last carried out her boast and secured the famous Dutoile emeralds. The jewels, which were to have been sold to-day, were in the duchesse's city apartment. The duchesse, who has a great sentiment for the gems, had unwisely insisted on keeping them by her this last night that they were to be in her possession. Against the advice of her advocate, when the household retired, the emeralds were placed in a small wall safe in the duchesse's boudoir where they were an easy prey for the notorious woman bandit and her gang.

On entering the boudoir early this morning the duchesse's maid discovered nothing disturbed except the wall safe. That had been opened. The emeralds were gone. In their place was the bit of linen parchment by which the Apache distinguishes herself, bearing the words, "Mimi, the Apache."

The duchesse is prostrated by her loss and refuses herself to all callers. The police are at work on the case.

In a sarcastic vein, there followed a great deal about the American plutocrat who would return empty-handed to his native land. From this Andrew opined that the French public as a whole preferred to see the jewels in the hands of Mimi, the Apache, rather than possessed of him, an alien.

Flinging himself into a chair, the French boy sobbed as if his heart would break.

A week later Andrew Silver sailed for America, but not as a prospective bridegroom.

Sylvia, feeling sure of the emeralds, had boasted extravagantly of them; she had even given them much newspaper publicity in such headlines: "Famous Jewels, Gift of Royalty, Purchased for Beautiful American Heiress," worked up remarkably well. It gratified Sylvia's peculiar sense of humor to see the envy it excited in the breasts of her best friends whose jewels faded into insignificance beside the Dutoile emeralds. But when she received Andrew's cable that the gems were lost to her, things assumed a very different complexion. She knew people were lifting their brows and remarking cynically, "Of course it's all a ruse. He never intended to buy them. They were too dear for the poor fellow." And Sylvia, her pride outraged, promptly dispatched a letter to Andrew.

It was a most petulant letter. Sylvia never minced matters. She was sure it was all his fault. If he had not dilly-dallied, the emeralds would never have been stolen. She hoped he was satisfied now that he had made her the laughing-stock of two continents, and she closed with a fine burst of characteristic temper in which she broke off their engagement forever and commanded him never to speak to her again, or write her, or seek her out.

This, however, was not the first time that his fiancée had severed their relations and declared martial law. The next maneuver was for Andrew to cable penitence daily until he could reach her side, there to cast himself on his knees at her feet and beg forgiveness. But suddenly, quite inexplicably, the young

man discovered that he had not the slightest taste for such a course. All at once, he was heartily glad to be free. His spirits soared like an inflated balloon released of its ballast, and he realized now that Sylvia's chains, although rose-garlanded, had galled him for some time. He knew he had not the slightest desire to shackle himself with them again. And in the intoxicating sweetness of his newly regained freedom, he was vaguely conscious of a sneaking sense of gratitude to Mimi, the Apache, who unwittingly had accomplished his release.

And so, for a newly jilted man, Sylvia's rejected lover was singularly lighthearted on the voyage home. Because the weather was a bit rough, Andrew, who never lost his sea legs, had the decks to himself a great deal. He never tired watching the drama of sea and sky played by the eternal changes of night and day. It was a spectacle that fascinated him. He smoked far into every night, sunk deep in a deck chair, his dreamy eyes intent on the diamond-pricked sky and turbulent waters.

On the second night out, a suspicion that had troubled him from the first crystallized into certainty. Things had developed a way of disappearing, regularly, consistently, from his stateroom. Again and again he had an instinctive feeling on entering his cabin that it had been but recently vacated.

He eyed the steward closely, but the things that disappeared were not things of which a steward would have need. They were edibles—fruits or a sandwich, perhaps—placed there by his order, to break his long night vigil above deck.

Andrew felt a curious unease. Some one during his absence and always at night, invaded his domain, made free of his midnight lunch, shifted things about on his writing desk, and disarranged the little shelf of books which he carried with him. Without a doubt, while he drowsed above deck in his chair, some one made himself comfortable in his cabin, spent a pleasant evening with his books and papers and fortified himself with his own specially ordered luncheon.

On the third night out, Andrew set a trap for this nocturnal intruder. Going to his steamer chair as usual after dinner, he waited until the ship quieted down for the night. Then, abandoning his practice of remaining on deck till long past midnight, he returned unexpectedly to his stateroom. Noiselessly fitting his key in the lock, he plucked the door gently open, closed it, and locked it behind him.

In the darkness he heard a low, stifled sound, a little more than a sigh. Andrew grinned grimly. The bird was snared. Between himself and the moonlight that streamed in through the porthole, he saw a shadowy figure crouched close against the outer wall.

"Who are you?" As he spoke, Andrew pressed the electric button that flooded the cabin with light.

Huddled there, was a slightly built youth in a shapeless blue suit, a tight jacket buttoned up close to his chin, a baggy cap pulled down low over his dark hair. He was staring at his captor with defiant blue eyes, his face very white, his lips twisted slightly awry in a smile both sardonic and defiant.

"Well?" demanded Andrew harshly.

The boy made no reply. Silent, stoical, he waited, asking no mercy. He was terrified but he did not tremble and there was something very gallant about his slim figure, tense and proudly erect.

"Well," repeated the man, "what have you to say for yourself? How came you here?"

"Make yourself no trouble," said the boy haughtily. Andrew might have been the one at fault, and he the hand of justice. "Call the—the *gendarmerie*. They care for such as me."

He had a husky, sweet voice and a

delightful French accent that made music of the English phrases. His blue eyes challenged the other fiercely to do his worst.

"Come, now," said Andrew easily. He liked the lad's gallant bearing, his defiant fearlessness. "Perhaps we may not need the police after all. This may be an affair which we can settle between ourselves."

The French boy stared at him through heavy black lashes which were like sooty smudges about his blue eyes.

"Come, *garçon,* what is your name?" Andrew lighted a cigarette and dropped into a chair.

"My name"—he stared at the American with passionate suspicion—"my name, eet is—Jacques."

"Is that so? And how came you here, in my cabin, Jacques? Bad taste for so handsome a lad as yourself!"

The Irish smile was very evident on Andrew's lips now, but the French lad mistook his pleasantries. He colored to the roots of his dark hair.

"Do not—do not—what you say?—make sport of me!" he cried furiously. "Call the *gendarmes.* I no monkey with you."

Andrew smiled again.

"Softly now, m. lad. It seems to me you are unduly anxious to meet the gentlemen in question. But I am not at all sure I shall turn you over to the authorities. Then his voice softened and his gray eyes rested pityingly on the lad's miserable white face. "I do not begrudge you the few things you've found here in my cabin, child. I am sure you had desperate need of them. I shall not report you. I fancy you are in trouble. Can I help you?"

He bent forward suddenly, his face transformed with his own particular winning smile. The French boy gasped; he searched the American's lean countenance with his fierce blue eyes; then, unexpectedly, broken by kindness as he could never have been touched by harshness, he went limp. Flinging himself into a chair, he buried his head in his arms and sobbed as if his heart would break.

Andrew, embarrassed, moved awkwardly about and waited for the storm to pass. After a time the boy who called himself Jacques raised his head.

"Now," the man settled himself comfortably to listen, "tell me all about it."

The lad choked, gasped, hesitated. Presently, in a low, quivering voice, pausing often to seek out the English phrases, he poured out his sordid story.

"I—I—a wharf rat—a—what you call it in America—a guttersnipe. I never have a—a—chance. I want, oh, monsieur, I want so bad to go to America, I burn up here"—he struck his breast passionately—"like a house afire. But nevaire, no, nevaire, in a hundred million years, do I get the money. I save, I work, I slave, but nevaire, no money. Then"—his eyes began to burn in his face—"then, I decide I stow away. I sleep aboard ship and hide. I watch my chance. It ver' hard. Ship's people ver' strict, ver' hard on stowaways, but, finally, monsieur, I get aboard." His voice rose dramatically. "I pretend I carry man's portmanteau on board and then I fly down corridor. I see one beeg closet there outside your door. I duck inside. It no beeg as I think, but I ver' little, myself. I crouch down on ze floor and hide. It ver' dark. After a bit I hear noises. The ship begin to stir, to slide. Oh, monsieur, I nearly die with—what you say—exult—I know—my dream come true at last. I on my way to America!

"But——" He sighed. "Soon I get ver' hungry. A thousand rats gnaw me here!" He struck his stomach violently. "I open door tiny bit. I peep out. It ver' dark; nobody about. I see your room open, the door acrack, where you have forgot to close it. I slip in. I find sandwiches; I no mean eat them all—but—I so hungry—the rats, they

gnaw me so, I eat a nibble here, a nibble there, and then"—he pleaded with Andrew for understanding—"and then, oh, monsieur, all your nice big sandwich just up—and gobble down my throat, so! I terrified. I ver' fearful. I fly to my closet and hide. All day I dare not stir out. But night come an' rats gnaw me worse than ever. I watch your door; I know you go out, no return till late. I swear myself no touch your sandwich, but, oh, monsieur, I so ver' hungry! I pretend I only slip in here to rest; I pretend I want look at books but suddenly I eat them all, your lovely sandwiches. Then to-night ——" He paused. "Then, to-night, you come; you catch me; you terrify me. I nearly die. I fear you give me over to the *gendarmerie*. I so shame I want to die. Then, monsieur, you pity me. It break my heart. It—tear me here—in my breast. Oh, monsieur, you—how can I tell you?—I nevaire *can* tell you how I so grateful am!"

He caught the American's hands and pressed them to his lips. Andrew flushed with embarrassment.

"That's all right, kid," he said gruffly, the better to hide his emotion. "You're safe, now. I'll report your being here to the captain in the morning, pay your passage, and you can share my cabin with me."

"No, no! I can no do that!" The French lad shrank back. "I no do that. Captain, he kill me, maybe. I must go back, I must go hide, I——"

He was so terror-stricken at the thought that Andrew hastened to reassure him.

"All right, young sport, you're the doctor. Probably you've your own reasons for keeping secret your presence on board. But at least you've no objections to my feeding you. You're not on a self-enforced starvation diet, I suppose. Sit down. I'll hunt up the steward and be back in a minute with a tray."

With a startled cry the American stared. About the soft, white neck glittered the Dutoile emeralds!

The French boy consumed every morsel of food on the well-stocked tray which Andrew brought; he ate like a famished young animal and yet with a certain delicacy that amused Andrew, a fastidiousness no American "gutter-snipe" would have dreamed of. When he had finished, he sank back in his chair and calmly scrutinized his host through his long lashes. With food and release from fear, the color had returned to his face. His eyes were saucy, brilliant; and once he laughed a gay, mirthful little laugh that caught at the man's heart.

Presently, his bright, roving eyes fixed on a slender, gold-framed likeness of Sylvia which Andrew in his great indifference had not troubled to banish from its accustomed place on his dressing table. "Is that American girl?" he asked.

The other nodded.

"She ver' pretty, ver' lovely. She—she like a statue, all ice and snow!"

Andrew smiled and gazed over the lad's shoulder at the portrait. There

was something statuesque about Sylvia's disdainful beauty with her cold, gray eyes like a bit of winter sky and her blond head, a statue of marble, or snow, perhaps, but a statue fashioned by a master's hand.

"Is eet true in America girl are permit to pick and choose for themselves?" asked Jacques abruptly.

"It is true," said Andrew, with a rueful smile. "And I have every reason to know. This young lady surely picked all over me and *then* she turned me down—hard."

Jacques' blue eyes opened wide.

"How—could she? You—you—so beeg, so handsome, so wonderful! How could she no love *you,* Monsieur?"

The man laughed to cover his embarrassment, but the lad's warm gratitude pleased him.

III.

During the remainder of the voyage, Andrew and the stowaway became great pals. All day the French lad cowered in his hiding place, sleeping and drowsing the long hours through. But when night came and the ship settled down, he dared to slip up on deck, secure in Andrew's protection. There, far into the night, the tall, somewhat stolidly-built American and the slender French lad contemplated sea and sky and exchanged widely differing philosophies over their cigarettes. The man saw to it that the boy lacked for nothing to eat, and shielded by his big body, the little exile passed unnoticed beneath the very eyes of vigilant sailors and officers.

Jacques was a defiant, fearless creature, high-spirited and debonair. He displayed a fine recklessness and a gallant devil-may-carety that appealed to that Irish part of the American which spoke in his cleft chin and whimsical smile. There was a gay, infectious note in Jacques' voice like the whistle of a saucy bluebird in early spring.

On the next to the last night out, a gorgeous night uncannily white with moonlight, the two of them idled, cigarettes in hand, on the upper deck. A great lifeboat which hung there shielded them from undue observation. The sea, washed in the silver of the moon's caressing radiance, rolled plaintively at their feet.

Andrew looked thoughtfully over the tip of his lighted cigarette into the moonlit space. A singular peace and contentment with all things, his soul, the world and the devil, pervaded him. Jacques, at his elbow, was singing in his low, sweet voice some running wordless ditty of the boulevards.

The wind quickened; the waves behind them stirred restlessly and the lifeboat creaked on its pulleys. But the man and boy, absorbed in their own thoughts, paid no heed. Suddenly, without warning, the ship gave a mighty roll and sank deep in the trough of the sea. Jacques cried out and snatching at the handrail, missed his footing. With a frightened shriek he plunged headlong toward the abyss of the sea.

Instantly Andrew's hand shot out. He seized the lad by his jacket, drew him back to deck and flung out an arm to steady him. The coat, closely buttoned to Jacques' chin, parted beneath the strain and pulled open at the throat. With a startled cry the American stared at the slim, boyish figure before him.

His lips moving soundlessly, Jacques clutched at his throat, his fingers fumbling frantically with the buttons. But he was too late. Andrew had seen, and cursed himself for a fool not to have suspected before. For that throat bore the tender whiteness, the unmistakable contours that belong to a woman. Jacques was a woman. And about her neck, baleful, glorious, almost venomous in the moonlight, glittered the famous Dutoile emeralds!

In perfect silence for one long minute the two of them, man and girl disguised as a man, stared at each other.

Then, his voice slightly hoarse from the shock of his discovery, Andrew cried out, "Mimi, the Apache!"

He saw it all, now—her need of secrecy, her fear, her terror. He understood why she had stowed away. The famous girl thief was taking a last desperate chance to reach America with the jewels which had possessed her soul. "*You* are Mimi, the Apache!" he repeated.

"Even so." The violet eyes mocked him; the scarlet lips parted in the defiant, sardonic smile for which he had come to watch. "And now you will *have* to call the *gendarmes,* eh, monsieur? The play, eet is over. Turn down the lights." She glanced at him quickly. "Perhaps already you regret your kindness, your pity? But for me —ah!—eet was heavenly! In all my life no one ever treat me so before. If —if"—she paused, then went on bravely —"if I must be take, I—I glad it ees at your hands."

But Andrew could not betray this fearless, gallant creature. He could not bear the thought of Mimi, gay, volatile, effervescent, in prison. Mimi condemned to gray walls, the sunshine of her irregular little face and her whimsical smile hidden forever! Not while he lived!

"I will not disclose your secret, my child," he said gently. "You need have no fear of me."

The girl stared at him. Her face quivered; her lips trembled.

"Why, before, could I no meet a man —who do for me—this?" She raised to his her great sapphire eyes, swimming with tears. Andrew's heart caught savagely. "You—you—make me—shame. You make me want to be good. No one ever try to make me good before. I—I *am* a little gutter-snipe—that part, eet was true—a child of the boulevards. I never have a chance to be good. When I a bit of a child, they teach me to steal and rob and pick pockets. The gang—they beat me if I return at night empty-handed. Then bye bye I come hard and cold and bitter like the rest. I think all the world bad. I believe I have right to take what I want cause nobody show me kindness; nobody give me a good word.

"Then I determine make myself Apache queen. I practice. I rise. Step by step I come up until one day I say I am leader of the band. I have my dagger in my hand. They no dare dispute me. They forced to fear and respect me. But eet ver' dangerous. To keep my hold I must be savage—like beast. If I show signs of weakness I know they hurl themselves on me as a pack of wolves; they would tear me to pieces. The emeralds—they sneer because I fail two time to take them. I do not dare fail third time. But—I sick of this life. I ver' sick *here.*" She laid her hand on her breast. "I hate the stealing, the fighting, everything. And so—so I decide I run away to America. I know they kill me if they find out. I stowaway on board ship. I—oh, monsieur, I want be good! In America think you—I can be good?"

She raised her great, troubled, violet eyes to his, and Andrew, suddenly hoarse and shaken, caught her two hands and pressed them against his heart.

"You are good, Mimi," he said, and suddenly he knew it was true. He would have staked his life on it. "You *are* good."

"Oh, monsieur!" He felt her tears on his fingers. "Good? I am a thief, with stolen emeralds aroun' my neck."

"You are welcome to the emeralds, Mimi," he said a bit unsteadily. An intoxicating sweetness coursed deliciously through his veins like heady wine. "*I* am the American who was to have bought them."

"For the girl on your dressing case?" asked Mimi, her soulful eyes fastened on his face.

He nodded.

"Perhaps," she faltered, "perhaps that is why she, what you call it, throw you down—hard!"

The man laughed, but his laughter was a trifle bitter and entirely mirthless.

"That is exactly why," he said tonelessly.

"Oh!" Mimi's face lengthened wretchedly. "I have cost you your sweetheart." Andrew would have stopped her but she hurried on in her vehemence. "Oh, I hate myself. I do injury to man who befriend me. I hate myself!" Her mood changed suddenly. Anger flashed like white lightning from her stormy eyes. "And I hate *her* too! She—she—ver' beautiful, ver' lovely, but, she—she ice—she one beeg icicle! You—you lov' icicle?" she asked wistfully. *"Mon Dieu!* Of cours' you do. Men, men all lov' icicle. No—nobody lov' little—little—fire pot—like me!" And she was gone like a flash of summer lightning.

Andrew went below. In his sleep that night he dreamt not of Sylvia's lovely face, but of the violet eyes, the sweet audacious lips, the passionate, ever-changing countenance of Mimi, the Apache!

IV.

On the next night, the last night out, Mimi did not appear. Andrew lingered on deck until he was almost beside himself with uneasiness; then he descended to his cabin. The stateroom was empty and the generous tray, which he had left in the usual place, was untouched.

The man forced himself to wait an hour. Unable longer to content himself with inaction, he rose and, nerved by desperation, went boldly to her hiding place. But the tiny closet where Mimi had crouched was empty. Now, terrified beyond all power of reason, Andrew rushed on deck. Even there, no slim boyish figure waited for him in the shadow of the mammoth lifeboat.

His heart in his mouth, he searched the great ship from stem to stern. He delved in darkened corners and even risked calling her name, but his voice echoed faintly, hollowly, and Mimi did not answer.

Toward dawn, worn out by his fruit-

"I have my dagger in my hand. They no dare dispute me. I am Mimi, the Apache queen."

less seekings, he flung himself down on a lounge in his cabin and slept heavily. Mimi's vivid little face, irregular, vivacious, detached itself from the fog of shadows in his dreams and stood out a moment etched in brilliant colors, then suddenly eluded his eager arms and vanished in the enveloping drabness while ghostly laughter mocked him.

He awoke with a start. The first gray of the coming day streamed through the porthole upon him. He drew his hand across his mouth. It seemed to him in his dreams that light lips, as ephemeral as the breath of the butterfly, had brushed his in a fleeting kiss.

The dawn picked out a packet near his hand. Andrew uttered a sharp cry and started up on his elbow. On the lounge by his side lay a slender parcel enveloped in an old, much-used blue handkerchief. The man's breath quickened. He recognized that handkerchief. Mimi had worn it knotted carelessly about her throat. With fingers that trembled, he undid it. The first sunbeam peeped curiously through the porthole, lingered entranced and multiplied a thousand times. They were the emeralds—that fateful rope of gorgeous gems, so strangely tangled with Andrew Silver's destiny.

A tiny scrap of paper had been twisted about the jewels. He drew it forth and spread it out tenderly. There on exquisite linen parchment was written in a fine and delicate hand:

For the icicle. May God bless your wedding day. MIMI.

The big American dressed himself with feverish haste. Once more he searched the vessel. Reckless, fairly beside himself and indifferent to curious faces and speculative eyes, he continued his quest. But Mimi was not to be found. Her old retreat was empty and nowhere could Andrew, in his distraction, come upon her.

A terrible fear cleft his heart. Could she, was it possible, that she had leaped overboard? This horrible thought congealed the blood in his veins. Like a man distraught he renewed his search, but without success. He stabbed the restless sea with his eyes as if he would fathom what ghastly secret it harbored within its cold breast.

Now they were nearing New York. Already its inimitable sky line had thronged the decks with eager faces. Suddenly Andrew was comforted. He could not believe Mimi had drowned herself; he could not imagine her doing anything so cowardly. No matter what her other faults, Mimi was not a quitter. He had a sudden conviction that wherever she was, she was carrying on, splendid creature that she was.

Somewhere in all that surging crowd that blackened the decks, she was hiding. Andrew's Scotch jaw set. She could not escape him. He meant to see every person that came ashore. He would discover her; she could not elude him.

With a delicate shiver and a burst of music from the orchestra the vessel came to anchor. There was much rushing about. The wharf was banked with welcoming faces.

Andrew stationed himself where he had an unobstructed view of the passengers which the ship was rapidly disgorging. There was a determined gleam in his eye.

After a while a thin, angular man with a horse-shaped face, a drooping mouth, and a cast in one eye that gave him a mournful air, made his way slowly up the great gangplank where the stream of outgoing travelers was rapidly dwindling away. He scanned the great decks, now almost deserted, with his misfit eyes. His lugubrious face lighted wonderfully when he beheld Andrew's grimly resolute figure planted in a Rock of Gibraltar attitude across the deck.

"Oh, there you are, sir," he said in a nasal voice, approaching as rapidly as his somewhat colossal dignity would permit. He paused at Andrew's side. "My word, sir, we thought you had not come. It gave me quite a turn, sir. Your luggage, sir, have you attended to it?"

This was Andrew's man, Pincher, an Englishman who had served him for years. He was an absurdly faithful old fellow but about as cheerful as a country churchyard. Pincher had suffered violent premonitory twinges when his master rushed off to Paris without him. Now his worst fears were realized. After prolonged waiting he had come on board to find his master, who was usually the first soul off an arriving ship, standing stolidly at the entrance to the gangplank, his eyes, blank and unseeing, his face, set, almost stony.

"My word," he told the second young man afterward, "I thought the dear fellow had suddenly taken leave of his senses."

"Are you ready to go ashore, sir?" asked Pincher anxiously.

Andrew only grunted. Not once did his unwavering stare vary.

The valet, moved almost to the point of tears, adopted an extremely patient tone, such a tone as one uses with the very young, or the very old.

"Come, dear Mr. Andrew, come with Pincher." He was sure his master was mad. "Come ashore now. There is some one waiting at the wharf to see you, some one you'll like to find there, sir. Come on; there's a good boy. Come with Pincher."

He laid his hand persuasively on Silver's arm. At his touch Andrew woke to sudden life.

"Oh, go to the devil," he said. "I'll be off when I'm ready, not before."

The valet gasped and opened his mouth to speak, but encountered such a baleful flame in his master's eyes that he backed away precipitately, and made his way hastily back to shore.

Alone once more, Andrew resumed his watch. The ship was almost empty of passengers. He began to tremble. Mimi's best chance for escape had lain in the great crowds that had filtered down the gangplank, and he would have staked his life she had not been among that jostling mass. All sorts of frightful fancies worked within him. Had she indeed made away with herself or was she still hiding in some unfrequented corner of the vessel? Anxiety ate at his heart.

A light touch on his arm brought him around with a start. Hope lit her torch in his heart, only to die instantly. He gazed, not into Mimi's vivid little face, but into Sylvia's sedate countenance. And he recognized a new Sylvia. She was strangely humble, with oddly deepened color, and almost timid eyes. Curiously, she seemed to lack her old imperiousness. He thought she was like a dethroned empress robbed of her state and pomp.

"Andrew, I—I must speak with you." She was frankly pleading with him—Sylvia, the haughty, Sylvia, the autocrat! "Can we not go over there somewhat apart? I *must* speak with you."

Although rebelling furiously within himself at the interruption, he had no recourse. He followed, staring back wretchedly over his shoulder. Was he to miss Mimi after all? How could he bear it should she elude him?

"Oh, Andrew"—Sylvia found difficulty in beginning, but he did not offer to help her—"oh, my dear, I—I am ashamed. That—that letter I wrote you. I—Andrew, can you ever forgive me? I am sorry."

He stared at her strangely. Here was what he had yearned for—Sylvia at his feet, contrite, entreating his forgiveness. Now, the reality left him cold. All at once, with a dull throb of pain mingled with a strange exultation,

he realized that she had been banished completely from his heart. Sylvia, the icicle, had melted before the flame of Mimi's violet eyes, her passionate, sweet voice. The love he had had for Sylvia had been a lukewarm thing compared to the geyser of passion that boiled up within him for Mimi—Mimi, child of the boulevards; Mimi, the Apache! It was a wild, unreasoning passion that recked nought of convention, of law or order. Suddenly his arms were furiously hungry for that slim, boyish figure, his lips thirsty for the little scarlet mouth. Criminal, thief, he cared not what she was. He wanted her, jealously, possessively.

"Andrew"—Sylvia's honeyed voice drew his reluctant eyes back to her—"do you forgive me?"

The big man stared at the clinging figure blankly. He had forgotten Sylvia lived.

"Yes, I forgive you," he said. Little did she dream it was the thought of Mimi that made his tone so gentle. "I forgive you freely. Your letter saved us both from a ghastly mistake. I accede the justice of your remarks; I grant you your freedom."

Sylvia gasped. The burning color flamed into her dignified face, then ebbed painfully away. She flinched as if the man had struck her, but he did not see. He was listening. From somewhere on the lower deck there came an excited tumult, angry voices, vituperation. He started as though a red-hot iron had seared him. In all that babble of confused and unrestrained tongues he recognized Mimi's voice, distressed, pleading.

Instantly, leaving Sylvia convinced that Pincher was right in thinking him bereft of his senses, he rushed away, mounting the stairs three at a time. There, at the entry to the hold, was gathered a little knot of sailors and officers, gesticulating wildly, and in their midst, like some small, badgered animal

"Oh, Andrew, can you ever forgive that letter I wrote you?" Sylvia, now, was frankly pleading.

at bay, stood Mimi, her blue eyes spitting defiance at the hostile faces that surrounded her, her slim figure erect, stiff with fury.

"I say, you *shall* go back, at once, by return steamer," the captain was shouting wrathfully, purple veins standing out ominously on his convulsed face. "Of two offenses are you guilty—the first, a stowaway, the second, a girl in boy's clothes! Bah! Shameless creature! Moreover, the quota is full. You cannot land. You *must* go back!"

"But I *cannot!*" She held out her arms piteously. "You do not know. I will die before I go back. My life, oh, monsieur"—she laid her hand on the choleric old captain's sleeve—"my very *soul* depend on my reaching America!"

"Bah!" the captain spat. "I have no choice. You cannot come ashore. The quota is filled. You must return to France."

"One minute!" Every head turned. There was a note of authority in Andrew's voice. "Is there any law against the wife of an American citizen landing?"

The captain stared at him sourly.

"Of course not," he snapped.

"Then," said Andrew, his eyes like steel gimlets in his lean face, "then, captain, you may marry us at once."

"What!" cried the captain, his mouth opening and shutting like a foolish sun perch.

"Andrew!" Mimi's little face flamed with sudden color. The young man thrilled. It was the first time he had heard his name on her lips.

He went to her, drew her close to his breast and kept an arm about her as if to reassure her that within that circle there was safety and protection for her, always. Mimi hid her burning face on his heart.

"We are ready, sir," he said coldly.

The old captain hesitated and opened his lips to protest, but at that moment he encountered the fury of Andrew's eyes, and thought better of it.

And so there in the center of that open-mouthed knot of rough-necked sailors, they were married—Mimi, child of the boulevards, and Andrew, American gentleman.

Unafraid, she faced the raging captain. "I tell you I will *die* before I go back!"

V.

"And I pronounce you man and wife."

The bridegroom lifted the girl's pointed chin and bent to take his first kiss from her scarlet lips. At that instant, however, there was the sound of footsteps, heavy, ponderous footsteps on the stair. Andrew glanced up quickly. Descending from the upper deck he saw a burly, bulky policeman, helmeted, his club in one hand, a formidable, legal-looking envelope in the other. Apprehension tightened the arm about Mimi's shrinking figure.

"Got a stowaway aboard, cap'n?" asked the officer in a burst of joviality.

Andrew's breath left him. A little shiver ran through Mimi's slender body. The captain nodded his head, questioning the policeman with his eyes.

"Got a warrant here for her arrest; it was cabled from abroad. Says to hold her till further notice."

Andrew's arm grew taut. He held Mimi close to his side. So it had come; they had ferreted her out. They were going to arrest her, to drag her back in shame and ignominy to Europe, to shut her up in some gray prison. The *gendarmes* were having their innings. Mimi, the Apache, had mocked them her last time. Suddenly a great fury possessed him, a flame of primitive passion. They should take her only over his dead body. He was ready to defend her with his life. Like a bear guarding its cub, he glared over his bride's bent head at her enemies.

"Toinette, Duchesse Dutoile," began the policeman impressively, "I arrest you by order of your guardian, le Comte de Février."

Andrew stared at the man blankly. His arms fell to his side. Amazed, he turned slowly and looked at the girl he

had just married. A murmur of surprise ran around the circle.

"*You* are the Duchesse Dutoile?" Andrew forced the words through his dry lips.

"Yes." She put out her hand, laid it piteously on his sleeve. "But you must forgive me. You *must* understand. I—I am the duchesse, the last of my line. But I reduce to such dire poverty; nothing, eet is left me of all my estate except the land and—the emeralds. The *comte,* my guardian, my father's friend, he ees a fierce man, a Frenchman of the old school. Bitterly he resent what he call the invasion of American ideas. Particularly he resent the increasing rebellion of French girls to marriages arranged for them by their parents or guardians. To him it ees blasphemy for girl to talk of please herself with husband. After much pain, he arrange for me a marriage with Rolet, a wine dealer, an enormous wealthy old man in southern France and for the *dot,* the wedding dowry, my guardian, he plan to sell the emeralds. But me"—Toinette shrugged her shoulders—"I cannot bear Rolet. He ees gross, fat-faced, a bleary-eyed old man. He has outlive two wives already and his grandchildren, they older than I—and so, I think I steal away. I think I fly to America where girls choose for themselves and I want, oh, so much, to bring the emeralds with me. So—I pretend the emeralds are stole, but all the time I have them hid here in my breast. One night I fly. I stowaway. I know if my guardian find me he drag me back, so I hide on board ship, and—and"—she faltered and flashed Andrew a pleading little look—"and the rest you know. Am I so ver' wicked to deceive you so? Can you, can you ever forgive me, my—my"—she paused to steal a saucy glance at the American's Scotch jaw—"my—how you say it?—my husband!"

"Forgive you, you—you little witch," cried Andrew, snatching her to him. "You—you bewildering creature of a thousand identities!"

"Well, how about this warrant!" It was the policeman's bored, blasé voice.

Andrew turned and encountered the twinkling eye of the law. It was an Irish eye and it recognized the Irish in Andrew's smile.

"O' course"—oh, the delicious broadness of that brogue!—"if ye and the young lady be already married, her guardian's kind o' out o' luck, I guess. Don't husbands sort o' antedate the rights o' guardians?"

"They do," answered Andrew with a broad grin.

"Then," said O'Ryan—his name *must* have been O'Ryan—"I guess it's me move to drop this little document overboard an', after wishin' ye both many returns o' the day, I think I'd best withdraw with the rest o' the spectators."

And withdraw he did. But Andrew would not have minded had he stayed. He had forgotten there were policemen in the world. The elated lover might have been on a desert island for all he knew of those about him. He had drawn Toinette into his arms, had bent his head above her.

"My little sweetheart, my bride!"

And Toinette, once Duchesse Dutoile, now a plain American citizeness, lifted her vivid little face like a brilliant flower, thirsty for the poetry of her husband's first kiss.

The Reward of Sacrifice

By May Freud Dickenson

Illustrations by Jo Lemon

THEIR hands clung together in the desperation of parting.

"Alice, Alice, if there was any other way—I could not—could not let you go."

"There is no other way." Her young face was haggard with misery. Suddenly she broke down and sobbed as if the weight of her trouble was more than she could endure. "I feel to-night, Hal, as if my heart is breaking. Do you realize, dear, that to-morrow our dream will be over? He will be here for his answer and I will have to say 'yes.' What else is there for me to do? Lucie has no one but me. Her whole future life depends on that operation. He'll give me the money to take her to New York." Her hands fell desolately to her sides.

The man was gray and tense with agony.

"He'll pay for the operation now, and you'll spend the rest of your life in hell paying him back! God, if I only had the money to give you!"

"If you only had, dear," she said wistfully.

Her tears fell on his hand. He held her trembling body close against his breast. His voice was bitter.

"If I had anything to offer you! The war knocked my prospects to a cocked hat and there's a meager enough living in the Civil Service. But to-night I feel like taking my gun and going out and grabbing a bunch of money from the bootleggers and smugglers it's my job to pinch."

The look on his face frightened the girl. She laid her hand softly against his cheek.

"Don't worry, Hal dear. It won't be too dreadful. I'll always have my love for you locked tight in my heart of hearts. I'll be rich and able to do things for Lucie." She broke off forlornly, her false courage deserting her.

"It might not be so rotten if Embrey was a regular fellow, but there's something queer and out of the way about him. I suppose it's having lived in the tropics so long, but I have my doubts about him. Then there's that half-mad old Hindu servant of his. Alice, couldn't the operation possibly be postponed?"

"No, even in a month the doctor says it may be too late."

She held his head against her breast, her own sorrow forgotten in her pitying tenderness for the man she loved.

"This is our last night together. Let us try to forget to-morrow."

Out in the moonlit garden the heavy scent of magnolias filled the air. The

night wind lifted the tendrils of the girl's hair with caressing wistfulness. From behind the rambling old Colonial house came the crooning melody of darkies singing.

For a long time the two sat, hand in hand, cheek pressed to cheek, trembling lips cold with anguish. Then at last the girl rose.

"It's getting late, dear. You must go."

She felt his arm tremble under her touch. For a moment all went black before her eyes and she felt herself sinking through mists of pain. She could not say good-by! Then her gaze riveted itself sharply on a light burning in an upper window. Lucie's window! Her little crippled sister Lucie!

She straightened her slender shoulders and looked up bravely into the man's face.

"Good-by, Hal dear. Remember—as long as I live I will love you."

Their lips met in a long kiss of farewell.

"Promise me one thing," he said hoarsely. "Promise that if you ever need me you will come to me."

"I promise," she answered.

The girl watched him till the dark shadows of the road hid him from view; then she fell on her knees in the garden and prayed, her eyes on the light in the upper window.

II.

Richard Embrey arrived the next day. He drove up in his expensive, high-powered touring car, which seemed strangely out of place in front of the old house from which all grandeur except that of memory had long since departed.

Alice Walton watched him from behind the parlor curtains. A chill of fear blanched her already pale face as she saw on the front seat of the car the dark, turbaned head of Embrey's mysterious Hindu servant.

She could remember as a child being frightened by the ugly stories they told in Ashton about Richard Embrey. Then he had gone to the Far East, and had come back twelve years later reputed to be worth a fortune.

People in Ashton wondered why so rich a man should have chosen their remote and impoverished little Virginia town in which to settle down. He had bought an abandoned tobacco plantation twenty miles out of town, the house facing the sea in a forlorn and rocky cove. Here, it was reported, he lived in almost Oriental opulence.

Wild rumors spread. The negroes whispered strange stories of "Marse" Embrey's magnificent rooms. A ten-foot wall had been built around the house and garden, and there were heavy iron gates which were kept locked. The windows of the one wing were barred.

Embrey was a strange man, unsociable to a marked degree. In consequence, his courtship of Alice Walton had been the sensation of Ashton.

It was an understood thing that the girl, to help her crippled sister, would have to accept him. She could not afford to let such a chance go by. Every one pitied her and young Hal Loring.

As Mandy opened the door for her fiancé, Alice saw the old negress shrink back with instinctive fear. She herself noticed anew the cruelty of Embrey's mouth, the harshness which slyly disappeared as she came forward to greet him.

"Ah, Alice!" His full-lidded eyes dwelt on the girl with an admiration that drove the hot red of shame into her pale cheeks. He held her hands in his and stooped to kiss them. "And how is Lucie to-day?"

At mention of her sister's name Alice forced a mechanical smile.

"I hope to have her really well soon," she said significantly.

"Good, good! I will make the necessary arrangements. We can all go up

North together just as soon as you will marry me."

She held herself taut. "I am ready any time you like."

He smiled with satisfaction. "Splendid, Alice!" His touch made her feel like something purchased on the slave block. She shrank back, dreading his kiss.

"I want to drive you out to see my place," he said. "You have never been there, and I have many rare and unusual things, treasures gathered from odd corners of the earth. Collecting that which is exceptionally beautiful is my hobby." He made her a low bow. "Once I get you out there, I will not want to let you go. I've a good mind to call up old Threshham and have him marry us right off!"

"Not to-day," she said faintly.

"Get a wrap on, Alice. I'll wait for you in the car."

The girl went slowly up the stairs, and as her leaden steps carried her higher it was as if she left behind all her youth.

She crossed to her window and looked out into the garden at the magnolias where she and Hal had said good-by. Tears blinded her. Suddenly she caught sight of Embrey at the car. His face was livid with rage. She started and suppressed a cry as she saw him raise his clenched fist and drive it smashingly into the Hindu servant's face. The man cowered, half shrinking under the seat in his efforts to escape the other's anger.

Alice pressed her hands hard against her lips. Cold fear possessed her. She knew almost nothing of Embrey except that he was wealthy and had offered to marry her. Suppose he was cruel to her! Instinctively she thought of Hal, who had promised her protection.

She went over to the telephone. Her hands trembled as she waited to get her number.

"Hal!" Her cry was an appeal. "Hal, I know I should not do this; we said good-by last night. But I'm going out to Embrey's place now in his car, and I thought some one ought to know. There's only Lucie and I here with old Mandy, and if anything should happen I——"

She rang off, fearful of her own strength of purpose were she to hear the loved voice.

Down in the car Embrey awaited her with ill-concealed excitement. "Ram Das will drive," he said. The Hindu salaamed deeply to the girl.

They drove out along the wide road. Embrey talked. He discussed his prospects, his winter plans, his travels, but Alice scarcely heard him. Her mind was busy with thoughts of the past—of her mother's deathbed and her promise to take care of Lucie.

Great fields of tobacco lay on either side. A great stone wall was ahead. An iron gate was opened by a frightened negro boy and closed behind the swift-moving car, and then a garden of unbelievable and exotic beauty lay before them.

The girl gave a low cry. Roses and oleanders and vivid cannas bordered the paths, while palms, arbors, and fountains produced a subtly Oriental effect. A white summerhouse, half smothered under the blossoms of a melon vine, was domed like a miniature mosque.

Alice got out of the car and stepped into the cool dimness of a large screened porch. A great green parrot screeched malignantly at her as she passed. The room beyond was dim, with glowing incense in high brass braziers. There were rich rugs and cushions on the floor, but no furniture other than a wide divan in a corner.

"My tastes as you see are Eastern," Embrey remarked as he flung his cap and coat to the Hindu servant. The man winced at his master's muttered curse, salaamed deeply, and withdrew.

Alice drew her cape more closely

about her. She was afraid. The air chilled her. The atmosphere was unwholesome, and she wanted to go away, to flee out into the sunshine.

"I have made greater concessions to Western ideas in the other rooms." The man opened the door of a boudoir. It was charmingly furnished in old rose and dull gold, but as the girl looked about her she noticed that the windows were heavily barred.

"I'll leave you here to brush up a bit. I've ordered tea in a few moments."

He left the room, and the girl, terrified without knowing why, took off her hat and wrap with trembling hands. She wished she had never come. She could never live in this place.

Out in the garden she saw some negroes working among the flower beds, but there was not the sound of a single voice singing or laughing. An oppressive silence crushed in upon her, a vague, quivering horror.

She could scarcely drag herself into the next room when Embrey knocked and called her for tea.

A carved teakwood table with a gold tea set had been placed beside the divan. Ram Das, the Hindu servant, stood in immaculate white behind a steaming samovar.

She sank down on the divan and took the cup Embrey handed her. Suddenly she saw the man's face darken with rage. He wheeled about, shouting at the Hindu. His clenched fist swooped down upon the table and a plate crashed into the servant's face and was shattered. As the blood poured from a cut in his forehead Alice sprang to her feet with a cry of protest.

"How could you? How could you?" She crossed to the man's side and reached for her handkerchief to bind up the wound.

"Go!" Embrey roared to the Hindu. With a salaam the servant left the room, but as he passed through the heavy portières Alice thought she saw in his smoldering eyes a look of gratitude for her.

"Sorry to have made a scene, Alice," Embrey said coolly. "Of course you do not understand about handling natives like Ram Das. In India we believe in keeping these people in their place. The man does not resent it."

"I think it is wicked, cruel, inexcusable!"

Embrey laughed softly. "Indigna-

Suddenly his face darkened with rage, and a plate crashed into the Hindu's face

tion is very becoming to you, my little Alice. I like you angry. But soon you will get used to me and my peculiarities; and in the meantime will you excuse me for a short while? I find that something has cropped up which demands my immediate attention."

"I want to go home!" the girl cried. "Please let me go."

"Nonsense! I will be back in a very short while." He clapped his hands sharply, and Ram Das appeared. Embrey gave his orders in the clipped staccato speech of an unknown language. As he moved toward the door Alice ran after him.

"I want to go! I will not stay here alone!"

He turned and faced her. "The truth is, Alice, I'm going in to town to fetch old Threshham, the minister. You will marry me when I bring him back, or I'll take you home now, and we'll put an end to everything between us immediately. You have a free choice. I do not wish to coerce you."

"I'll stay." The words were almost automatically wrenched from her lips. She had been through the struggle with herself so often that there was no use repeating it. She had agreed to marry Embrey. That the actuality was even more dreadful than her imagination had pictured it, comforted her in some strange way.

Like one in a trance she saw Embrey drive away, heard the roar of his motor die in the distance. She crossed back to the table and tried to swallow a cup of tea, but it choked her. She flung herself down on the divan and sobbed. It was as if she had sentenced herself to prison for life. There was no escape.

Suddenly she felt on her the dark, burning eyes of Ram Das.

"The memsahib must not stay. Not good here. The sahib sometimes get very angry, beat me—you—any one." He leaned closer. "It is the hemp, the Indian hemp he take that make him very bad."

Alice's eyes widened with horror. "I must go!" she cried.

"You cannot go now. There is no car and the gates are locked. But Ram Das is the friend of the memsahib. He forgets neither kindness nor injury." His dark eyes burned with an inward fire that seemed to consume him. "The hand of Embrey sahib has been raised against Ram Das in unjust anger, but that is not all."

His voice sank to a whisper. "In my country, Hindustan, they call him the Black Sahib. Once he is in charge of a tea plantation. There he beat and abuse all those who work for him. There is one; she is young and very beautiful. He does not beat her at first. Then later he fling her aside, leave her to die. When I come back from France where I go in the Great War, I find her dead. She was my daughter, the flower of my lonely heart. Then I seek service with Embrey Sahib; I am willing to follow him to this country. But always Ram Das wait and watch."

The whispering voice died away. The turbaned head sank on his breast. He salaamed and left the room noiselessly.

For a moment Alice sat, her hands clasped rigidly in her lap. Then moved by an impulse she could scarcely define, she sprang up, hurried into the boudoir, and put on her hat and wrap.

As she stepped across the threshold onto the porch a vicious-looking mastiff snarled threateningly at her. She shrank back. A negro working among the flower beds looked up.

"I want to go away," she called out. "Please call off the dog."

The negro shook his head.

"Marse Embrey say you not to leave the house, missy. We all has our particular orders."

"But I won't be kept here! Hold that dog and let me pass."

The negro shuffled farther off. "Marse's orders. There ain't no one here goes 'gainst Marse Embrey."

"I'll give you all the money I have with me," Alice urged.

The man rolled his eyes in terrified refusal and disappeared behind a hedge.

Desperate with fear, the girl ventured a step farther out on the porch. But the mastiff's growl warned her of her folly, and she turned back and went into the living room. Its magnificence was sinister. Dark faces seemed peering out at her from behind the rich embroidered hangings; subdued voices murmured and died away.

In a frenzy of panic she rushed to the barred windows and beat against the panes with her clenched fists. The high wall shut out sight of everything but the garden. She searched in vain for a telephone. Then suddenly she thought of Hal. He knew where she was. There was infinite comfort in that thought.

Old Mr. Threshham would not marry her against her will. But everything she had done had been of her own volition. She hid her face in her hands. The thing had gone so far there was no use quitting now; she must be brave and go through with it for Lucie's sake.

A motor car purred down the road. In the front seat Alice recognized the venerable Mr. Threshham. She shrank in her chair, quivering with dread.

Embrey's voice reached her. He was calling her. She wiped her eyes and came forward.

"Alice, Mr. Threshham is here. Have you made up your mind what you wish to do?"

She raised her eyes haggardly to his. She could not speak, but stood before him mute and stricken, like a trapped animal.

Embrey took a small velvet bag from his pocket.

"This ruby was given me by a maharajah. Once it adorned the neck of

The minister paused as the door was flung open and Hal burst in.

the pearl of his harem. Now it will adorn the no less exquisite loveliness of my wife."

He clasped a slender chain about the girl's throat. She looked down and saw blazing on her breast, like a throbbing heart of fire, a ruby of such extraordinary beauty that she gasped.

"You are pleased." He smiled with satisfaction. "Do not be afraid, Alice. I may be eccentric; I have my own ideas about women, but you will lack nothing to make you happy. Shall I tell Threshham we are ready? Ram Das and the gardener can act as witnesses."

The girl's fingers touched the ruby on her breast, and her eyes fastened themselves almost hypnotically on its living red. Then her surroundings faded. Voices whispered to her; visions seared her brain. A force wrenched at her heart: her mother's dying appeal to her, Lucie's frail and broken helplessness, Loring's hands clasping her own in the tragedy of farewell.

"Tell Mr. Threshham I am ready."

She took her place before the old minister. Dark eyes and faces were all about. She heard the old man's low

voice. Her body seemed chilled to ice, her heart dead within her.

In a daze she heard the marriage service begun. She felt Embrey take her hand. The words droned meaninglessly, a blur of terrible sound in an intense silence.

"Wilt thou, Alice, take——"

Suddenly the girl's fainting senses became aware of a new sound, the pur of a motor outside. Her lips parted eagerly, but she made no response to the minister's question.

The sound grew louder. Embrey dropped her hand and wheeled about. The door was flung wide, and Hal Loring burst into the room.

"Alice!" His cry brought the girl to his side.

"Hal! Why did you come here?" She clung to him, quivering with terror.

He put his arm about the girl's waist and held her close. "I saw Embrey and Threshham drive this way. I figured he'd try to force you to marry him before we got him." He wheeled on Embrey and pulled out an official-looking paper. "I've always had my doubts about you. This clinches it!" He thrust the paper in the other man's face.

Alive or Dead!—$5,000 Reward for the Capture of Richard Embrey, Opium Smuggler.

With a roar of rage Embrey flung himself on Loring. They closed in a life and death clinch.

The younger man felt Embrey's hands clutch about his throat. He struggled backward to free himself, and suddenly dropped to his knees. He reached up, clasped his hands behind Embrey's neck and swung him headlong over his shoulder. The other man smashed into the teakwood table, but lurched heavily to his feet. With a pantherlike spring Loring again flung himself forward.

There was the crack of a pistol shot. Loring fell face downward on the rug and lay still in a widening pool of blood.

With a cry Alice threw herself down beside him.

"Hal! Hal dear, speak to me!"

Suddenly she looked up over her shoulder and shrieked with horror. Embrey with the face of a madman leaned above her, the smoking pistol clenched in his hands.

"So you tried to double cross me!" he shouted.

He flung to one side the feeble hold of the old minister. Alice felt the cold pressure of the gun against her throat, but before the crazed man could draw the trigger a white-turbaned figure leaped upon him.

There was the flash of a knife, a groan. Embrey flung up his hands and dropped heavily across the divan.

"So he has met with death, and my long journey is done."

The curtains parted and Ram Das, with a deep salaam to Alice, vanished.

With the help of old Mr. Threshham and the gardener Alice tied up Loring's wound. Together they managed to get him into the car, and thankfully they left that house of horror forever.

Embrey lay dead across the divan. On the threshold the mastiff raised his voice and wailed.

MARY MEAD'S charming new story,

"Who Was Her Mother?"

begins in the next issue.

The Other Man's Child

by Ruby M. Ayres

Author of "The Love of Robert Dennison" etc.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I DON'T KNOW THE WOMAN!"

RANDOLPH DACRE left the Lindsies' house hardly knowing whether he was glad or sorry that he had at last got his heart's desire.

There was much pain in the knowledge that, although Nora had promised to be his wife, and he had given her his signet ring to wear until such time as their engagement might be publicly announced, she had no love for him.

A longing for sympathy, rather than any real affection for the man, had prompted Nora to accept him, and Dacre was fully aware of the fact. He had not the smallest idea, however, that there was another man she loved with all her heart and soul, and he greatly comforted himself as he walked away through the gray evening with the truth that when a woman's affections are free, any man may lay siege to them.

It had not come altogether as a surprise to him to hear that Mrs. Lindsie had been living on borrowed money. He had heard rumors of something of the kind many times. He also knew Granville Elder, and knew very little that was good of him.

He was glad that he himself was a rich man. He wondered how soon she would consent to marry him. He knew that it could not be very quickly, as she still wore mourning for Guy Stanton, and he had no wish to draw her any farther into the whirlpool of uncharitable scandal.

Only that afternoon he had heard Mrs. Dallas, who was supposed to be one of Mrs. Lindsie's greatest friends, sneering at Nora and pitying her disappointment.

Women were cats, he thought fiercely.

For the first time in his life Dacre realized that one could find happiness by trying to make it for some one else. He had always been selfish, possibly because nobody had ever seemed to expect him to be anything else. It was a pleasant feeling to know that a woman, and a woman he loved, had turned to him for comfort and affection.

Already he viewed life through rose-colored glasses; his thoughts were all of a radiant future. He looked very handsome and happy when later he turned into his club, and encountered George Wharton in the lobby.

Wharton hardly noticed him. He would have passed had not Dacre stopped.

The men were only acquaintances, but this evening Dacre was on good terms with the world. He cried out:

"Hello, old man!"

George looked back.

"Hello," he said dubiously. The heartiness of the greeting surprised him. He hesitated a little before accepting the younger man's proffered hand.

"Come and have a smoke," said Dacre affably. He overruled the other man's refusal, and insisted on accompanying him back to the reading room.

"You're looking a bit seedy," he said, dropping into a chair and lighting a cigarette.

Wharton flushed.

"I've had enough to make me so," he said curtly. "But I'm clearing off abroad soon."

Dacre looked at him with sympathetic eyes.

"Oh, that's too bad!" he objected. "Isn't America good enough for you? Hang it, man, you've no reason to turn your back on it!"

"You think not? Well, unfortunately every one doesn't think the same, and you see I've no ties to keep me."

Dacre recalled the rumor he had heard some days previously.

"You've got the youngster," he said stupidly. "I heard you had a youngster and a wife."

Wharton was pale enough now; his lips twisted wryly.

"You've heard wrong then," he said in an almost expressionless voice. "Who told you such a yarn?"

Dacre knitted his brows.

"I really don't remember," he said at length.

"It is of no consequence."

Dacre blew a smoke ring thoughtfully.

"Why don't you get married and settle down over here?" he suggested. "You've got a good time to come, in spite of what's happened, and nobody worth his salt believes the story they tried to tack onto you. Darned if I'd clear off! I'd stay and face it and let 'em all see that I wasn't afraid of them."

"I'm not afraid of them; sick of them, perhaps."

Dacre was longing to tell his great news to somebody. He looked at Wharton, and decided he could be trusted not to repeat it.

"It's a queer world," he said after a moment. "Things always happen when you've given up all hope. If any one had told me that I should ever get what I've been after for the past eight months, I'd have laughed at him."

Wharton hardly heard. He was wishing he had not been persuaded into stopping. He was sensitively aware that a waiter in the lobby had looked askance at him, that a man who had been reading at the end of the room, had got up and walked out as he entered.

Possibly it was coincidence, but the greater possibility of its being deliberate rankled.

"Yes," Dacre went on ruminatingly, "I can truthfully say that this has been the happiest day in my life, and that's saying a lot! I've had some mighty happy days, but this evening——" He smiled at the remembrance.

Wharton stared at him. He had always considered Dacre slightly effeminate. Many times he had laughed at his immaculate dress and too handsome features.

He pulled out his watch and glanced at it meaningly, but Dacre was too wrapped up in his own thoughts to notice. He sat up with sudden energy.

"You look like a fellow who could keep a secret," he said. "And I know she's always been a friend of yours."

"A friend of mine?" Wharton echoed the words with irony. "I am interested. My friends are surprisingly few these days."

"She's stuck up for you through thick and thin," the other resumed, warming to his subject. "She jumped on me hor-

ribly when I dared even to suggest that —you know. Of course, I never meant it, but——" He looked distressed at his blunder.

"Oh, you need not apologize!" said Wharton dryly. "I'm quite hardened, I assure you!" But he had winced, all the same.

"You see," Dacre went on, "I've always been so keen on her right from the very first. It was quite different from anything else, and I've known a few women in my time," he added complacently. "But she wasn't like the rest; there's something about her that—isn't there?" he appealed.

Wharton half smiled.

"Tell me who this mysterious 'she' is," he said with an effort to speak lightly, "and I'll give my opinion, as you seem so anxious to have it."

The younger man's face fell.

"I thought you knew," he expostulated. "There's only one woman it could be—Nora Lindsie. God bless her!"

Wharton had been standing with his back to the fireplace, idly puffing at a cigarette. It fell now from his lips to the rug. For a moment he looked as if carved in stone.

Then he moved mechanically, and picked up the fallen cigarette.

"Miss Lindsie? Nora Lindsie?" he said.

"Yes. It's not known yet; can't be, you see, on account of poor Stanton. But she's going to marry me later on. Of course I wouldn't have told anybody but you. I'm sure you won't tell any one." There was a shade of anxiety in his voice.

"No," said Wharton mechanically, "I won't tell any one." He roused himself with an effort. "I'm sure I wish you every happiness."

"Thanks! I knew you would. But it's her happiness that's the chief thing. Poor little girl, she's had a rotten life of it, I know! I dropped in this afternoon and found her broken-hearted. Mrs. Lindsie had been talking, I suppose. You know what a tongue she's got!"

There was a grinding of brakes, and a scream.

Wharton's hands were clenched, but his face was expressionless. He marveled at himself that as yet he seemed to feel nothing. Nora was going to marry Dacre. It seemed incredible. Nora, who had so passionately protested that she loved him only!

"Well," he said with forced gayety, "congratulate her for me when you see her, won't you?"

"Oh, but it's a secret!" said Dacre quickly. "Nobody's to know. It's so soon, you see——"

"Nobody shall know from me," said Wharton shortly. "I must be going. Good-by!"

"Good-by, old man!"

Dacre lay back in his chair and lighted another cigarette. He felt much happier now that he had confided his secret to somebody. It made it seem more real.

He felt sorry for Wharton. Poor devil! He looked bad. He decided that

he would ask him to dinner some night. Personally he did not believe for an instant that he had had anything to do with Stanton's death. It was a rotten shame for people even to suggest it!

It was an hour later when Dacre remembered that he had promised to dine with some friends. He had fallen half asleep in the deep chair. The waking remembrance drove him to his feet with a start.

It was seven o'clock.

Dacre prided himself on his punctuality. It really was annoying to find that he had dozed off and forgotten all about the engagement. He seized his hat and sent a porter for a taxi.

He told the man to drive to his apartment. He leaned forward, fuming and fretting, wondering if it was in any way humanly possible to change his clothes and make his appointment on time.

He leaned forward.

"Can't you go faster? I'll double your fare if you can get there in five minutes."

The man touched his cap and put on speed recklessly.

It was now dark, save for the flare from street lights, stores and theaters. They threaded their way with difficulty through the stream of vehicles, for New York was waking up for its evening amusements.

They had almost reached the expensive mansion where Dacre lived in luxury, when, as they rounded a corner, a woman stepped off the walk right in front of the cab.

The driver shouted. There was a grinding of brakes, a scream, and then Dacre wrenched open the door and sprang out. It was all up with his dinner appointment now. They had knocked some one down, and there would be no end of a fuss. He rushed to the front of the cab.

A woman lay huddled up in the street, half under the front wheels. There was an ugly bruise on her forehead and a stream of blood running slowly down her white face.

The street was comparatively quiet, but already several people had come hurrying up. A man was trying to draw the woman from beneath the car. The driver was clumsily wiping the blood from the face scarcely whiter than his own.

"She stepped right off the curb without looking," he said shakily. "I sounded my horn, but she never looked round."

"It wasn't your fault," said Dacre.

He looked down at the woman's face. A handsome face it was, in spite of its make-up and powder. The fall had torn her hat from her head and loosened her masses of dark hair. It seemed to accentuate her pallor alarmingly.

The crowd had increased.

"Look here," said Dacre impatiently, "take her to my apartment. It's quite near. Lift her in the cab, some of you fellows!"

He hated a scene. He overruled some one's opinion that she ought to be taken to the hospital, and insisted on her being brought to his place. He himself walked over.

He told his man briefly what had happened.

"She isn't hurt much, I think," he said. "See to things for her, Johns, will you? And ring up Mrs. Lee and say I can't dine with them. Say there's been an accident; say anything you like!"

He flung down his hat and walked into the cozy book-lined sitting room. He hated accidents, hated anything unpleasant, in fact; but he was sorry for the woman, and hoped she was not badly hurt.

After a moment he called to Johns again, and told him to ring up a doctor.

"Must do all we can for her, you know," he said laconically.

They had carried the woman into the

dining room and laid her on the couch. Dacre walked to the door, looked in and walked away again.

He hated the sight of blood, and now that he saw her more closely she looked really bad. He hoped she would not die in his house. He wished he had taken the man's advice after all, and had her sent straight to the hospital.

He heard the doctor arrive, heard his fussy voice in the hall. After a moment the reliable Johns entered.

"Concussion, sir," he announced stolidly. "Doctor says she must go to the hospital. No means of identification, sir, except this."

He held out a small locket threaded on black velvet.

Dacre took it up gingerly. It was a cheap little trinket, the case so thin that it would have dented with ordinary finger pressure.

He opened it without much curiosity. He was confident as to what he would find inside—a man's portrait, perhaps, or a lock of hair. The woman looked just the sort of person to wear a thing like that.

He was right. When he opened the case he saw the portrait of a man, badly reproduced, and as badly colored, a man with a fat, cruel face, a face that —Dacre rubbed his chin thoughtfully; he had seen that face before. But where? That was the question.

He stared at the little portrait with puzzled eyes, his man Johns watching him interestedly. Suddenly Dacre gave an exclamation. "It's Wharton's butler!"

He had only once dined with George Wharton, and that had been some time before Stanton's death; but he was sure that he was not mistaken now in his recognition of Dodson. He had been struck by the hint of brutality in the man's face as he waited at dinner that night, and had recalled it more than once since.

With the locket in his hand he crossed the room and took down the telephone receiver. He gave Wharton's number and waited patiently for his reply.

George was out, so a feminine voice told him, and nobody knew quite when he would be back.

"Who is it speaking?" asked Dacre.

"It's Lucy, sir. I'm the parlormaid." There was a faint giggle audible in the words.

"Oh!" Dacre smiled. His fancy was tickled. "Well, Lucy, perhaps you can tell me what I want to know?"

"I'll do my best, sir."

"Well, can you give me the address of Mr. Wharton's late butler, the fat man? It's very urgent."

"Oh yes, sir." The answer came readily enough now. "It's in the Bronx, sir. I'll ask cook for the number."

Dacre waited patiently. When she returned he made a note of the address, and rang off.

It was eight o'clock now. The doctor came out of the room where the woman lay as Dacre hung the receiver back in its place. He looked dubious.

"She ought not to be moved," he said slowly. "But—well, we can hardly expect you to allow her to remain here."

"Oh, she can stay and welcome!" said Dacre with a shrug. "I can go to a hotel. Is she seriously hurt, doctor?"

"It's impossible to tell at present. I'll come back later on. But I'm afraid——"

"I'm sorry, awfully sorry! I've just got on the track of some man who knows her. She had his portrait in that locket; used to be butler to a friend of mine—Wharton."

"George Wharton?"

"Yes. He's left now, though."

"Humph! Well, the man had better be sent for."

"I'm going to get him."

Dacre was glad of something to do; it gave him an unpleasant feeling to

know that he was responsible for the accident. He had told the man to drive fast; certainly it was his responsibility.

He sent for another taxi, gave Dodson's address and drove away.

He did not much like the part of town to which Lucy had directed him. He was glad when the cab stopped grindingly at the curb.

"You can wait for me," he said.

He went up the unwashed steps and knocked on the door.

He could hear footsteps, and caught a glimpse of a curtain pulled aside for a moment from the front window. Then the door was opened a couple of inches, and a dark, sallow-faced youth eyed him suspiciously.

"Does a man named Dodson live here?" asked Dacre in his slow drawl.

"He's a liar!" cried the boy. "She's his wife—poor soul!"

The youth stared, his brows frowning sullenly.

"What do you want with him?" he asked.

Dacre explained.

"A young woman has met with an accident and——" Before he could finish his sentence some one came up the steps behind him. Looking round, Dacre found himself face to face with the very man he sought.

Dodson was very respectably dressed in a brown overcoat and slouch hat. He started visibly when he saw Dacre.

"I'm just asking for you, Dodson," said the young man. "A young woman has been run over by a taxicab, and rather badly hurt. She's at my apartment at the present moment. We found your portrait in a locket she was wearing, and strangely enough I recognized you. I saw you at Mr. Stanton's. Dare say you remember me, eh?"

"Yes, sir." Dodson's voice was respectful, but his eyes were furtive.

Dacre fumbled for the locket. He drew it out by its shabby ribbon and handed it to the man.

"This is the locket," he said.

Dodson handled the little trinket almost reluctantly, it seemed; then he returned it to the young man.

"It has nothing to do with me, sir," he said smoothly. "I know no young woman answering to the description. I don't know what she's doing with my picture. It has nothing to do with me, has it, Jim?" he added, turning to the lanky youth on the step above.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"SHE'S HIS WIFE!"

Randolph Dacre stood on the steps outside the small house in the waning daylight, staring from one man to the other.

Dodson, a step below him, met his eyes fairly and squarely with the fixed, unflinching gaze of a man who is an

habitual liar. The youth Stephen watched them both furtively from the half-open door.

Dacre opened the little locket. He was not in the least deceived by Dodson's flat denial; he was positive the man was lying. He held the portrait out to him.

"You can't get away from that, my man," he said briskly. "Young women don't carry strange men's portraits about with them. I don't know what your idea is in denying that you know her, but it doesn't go down with me."

Dodson paled.

"I tell you I don't know her," he said, and the even civility of his voice had changed to a bullying tone. "I'm not responsible for every woman who makes a claim on me." He looked up threateningly at the youth. "Speak up, Steve," he said sharply. "You know I don't know her."

Stephen suddenly flung the door wide. He stood in the opening, his thin, stooping figure silhouetted against the darkness of the passage behind him; there was a dull flush in his face.

"You're a liar!" he said roughly. "I'm sick of you and your ways. What's the use denying it? The gentleman won't believe you." He turned to Dacre. "The girl's my sister," he said gruffly. "And she's Dodson's wife and —well, she knows it, poor soul!" he added with rough tenderness. "He's made her life a hell ever since she married him. I wish to God she were dead!"

There was a tragic silence. Dodson stood with clenched fists and an ugly smile on his fat face. Stephen faced him with defiant eyes.

Randolph Dacre snapped the little locket together and returned it to his pocket. He felt that there was some strange story behind this extraordinary scene.

"Well," he said laconically, "it's no particular concern of mine, but if either of you is interested in the woman, you'd better come along; the doctor seems to think badly of her."

He made a movement as if to go down the steps.

"I'll come with you," said Stephen. He caught up a hat from a peg in the dark hall behind him, brushed past Dodson without a word and followed Dacre down to the waiting cab.

Dacre looked back over his shoulder.

"Your friend will not come?" he asked.

Stephen shook his head. The two men entered the cab and drove away.

The younger man sat leaning forward, his thin hands clasped loosely between his knees, his dark brows frowning above his somber eyes.

"Is Bess really bad, sir?" he asked jerkily.

Dacre nodded.

"Afraid so. The taxi I was in knocked her down."

They drove some way in silence. Suddenly Stephen burst out impulsively:

"I hope she dies! It's the only sort of freedom she'll ever get from that brute!"

Dacre thought of Dodson's brutal face and lowering brows.

"He certainly seems an unpleasant sort of gentleman," he said lightly. "Born to be hanged, I should say."

Stephen cast a lightning glance at him; he laughed shortly.

"There's some truth in that," he said.

The doctor had gone when they reached Dacre's rooms, but the man Johns informed them that there was still no change.

"The nurse is here, sir," he added in an undertone.

The two men went into the library. Dacre felt restless and ill at ease. He would have been glad to get out of the house and stay out, but he hardly liked to go.

Stephen asked to be allowed to see

his sister, but the nurse refused. "Not yet," she said.

Dacre glanced at his watch.

"I'll be getting off. You can put up here for the night, if you like. I'm going to a hotel."

He left the house with a sense of relief.

He passed a restless night, however, and before nine o'clock he was up and dressed, an unusual thing for him.

He rang up his apartment and inquired after the patient. Johns said she was no better, and added on his own authority that he did not think she ever would be.

"Poor girl!" said Dacre. He thought of Dodson, and the younger man's impulsive words, and pitied the woman from the depths of his heart.

He idled the morning away, and then went round to the Lindsies'. Nora was out, but he waited till she came in.

She looked pale and weary, but she smiled when she saw him, and turned a passive cheek to meet his kiss.

"I thought you would come earlier," she said.

She had hoped he would. She dreaded being left alone with her thoughts; she wanted Randolph's presence to drive away the aching memories and torturing thoughts that would not let her rest.

"I would have," he answered with a flush of pleasure that she had looked for him, "but I had a nasty accident last night; the taxi I was in knocked a woman down. It was quite close to my place and she was taken in there; she's still there, as a matter of fact, poor thing! The doctor said she ought not to be moved, so I told him to let her stay. I camped out in a hotel. I'm afraid she's badly hurt."

"Poor thing! A young woman, Randolph?"

"Yes, a dark, rather good-looking woman. We found out where her people were by a locket she wore with the portrait of a man inside. Oddly enough, I recognized the man. Who do you think he was?"

"I don't know."

Nora was not really interested, but she was glad for some one to talk to, glad for something to divert her thoughts.

"Dodson, the man who used to be poor Stanton's butler. I'm sorry, dear," he added quickly, seeing how she winced. He cursed himself again for a blundering idiot.

"It's quite all right," she answered, but she drew her hand from his. "I remember Dodson quite well—a big, stout man, with a crafty face. I remember telling Guy I did not like him, and Guy laughed. I should not envy his wife."

"No; and the odd part of it is that the fellow denied he knew the woman!"

"Really!"

"He was lying, of course, and a lanky youth gave him away—told me Dodson was her husband. It appears that the youth is her brother. There's a mystery about them all. I can't make it out, but I'm sory for the woman."

"And do you really think she will die?"

"Afraid so." Dacre's handsome face was grave. He felt the situation keenly, and blamed himself entirely for the accident. It is no light thing to feel you have taken human life, however unintentionally.

"I wonder if there is anything I could do for her," said Nora. "It seems so sad."

"It's like you to think of it," said Dacre gratefully. "But you don't want to be mixed up in the affair, and I told them to see she had everything she wanted."

But later in the evening he was not at all surprised to hear from Johns that Miss Lindsie had called at his apartment to see the poor woman who had been knocked down.

"When did she come?" he asked eagerly.

"About four o'clock, sir, and she stayed quite a while, sir; the—the young person had just come round then, sir."

"It's just like her kind heart, bless her!" was Randolph's thought. It gave him delirious joy to know that Nora had been there. He rapturously kissed one big chair where the cushions looked a little disturbed. He would possibly have felt chagrined had he known that Johns was responsible for his foolishness, having hastily vacated luxury upon hearing his master's voice.

And perhaps he would not have felt quite so happy had he been present during that interview between Nora and Bess Dodson.

Kindness of heart had certainly prompted the visit in the first place. But there was also a strong vein of curiosity in Nora's motive. Dodson had been Stanton's butler, but Dodson had also known Wharton, and when a woman loves a man there is no link even remotely connected with him that does not interest her.

Nora had seen for herself at the inquest that Dodson had no liking for George Wharton; and now when she heard of the accident to the man's wife, she felt compelled to go and see her. It was a link, although so slight, with the man she loved, the man whom she believed she would never see again.

The nurse had hesitated at first when Nora asked to be allowed to see her patient, but something in the girl's face appealed to her. She remembered the tragedy in which she had figured so prominently, and curiosity got the better of her judgment.

Nora followed her softly into the darkened room. It was a small room, and one could see at a glance that it belonged to a bachelor, although it contained many luxuries.

It was upholstered in soft shades of gray. The single brass bed stood in an alcove. A litter of man's shoes was near the fireplace; a man's dressing gown hung on the door. There were brushes and shaving things on the washstand which had not been moved, a great many sporting prints on the wall, and lastly, a large silver-framed portrait of herself in the center of the mantel shelf.

Nora felt a twinge of remorse as she saw it there. She felt as if she was cheating the man whose devotion had given her the place of honor in his life.

It was as if a hand seized her by the throat and tried to choke her whenever she remembered that she had promised to be his wife. His wife! What an impossibility! It was madness to think of it, madness!

She turned her eyes away from her own portrait and found the nurse watching her curiously. The woman had long since noticed the silver-framed picture and drawn her own conclusions. She knew how much Nora was admired and sought after; she had heard it rumored that she had not been so grieved by the tragedy of Stanton's death as had been popularly supposed. Now she was sure that Dacre was the man whom the girl really loved.

Nora flushed as she met the curious eyes upon her. She moved quickly toward the bed. Then she drew back with a start and a smothered exclamation, for the woman who lay there was the one who had spoken to her the previous day outside her own house, the woman who claimed to be George Wharton's wife, and the mother of his son!

CHAPTER XXIV.

"YOU KNOW WHO KILLED HIM?"

When Bess Dodson opened her eyes through a mist of pain and unreality, she saw a sweet face, full of pity, bending over her.

She lay quite still without moving or

speaking. There was a dull noise in her head, like the sound of the sea breaking against rocks far, far away. She felt as if she were floating in space, as if her body were touching nothing.

The sweet eyes above her smiled through something that glistened like tears in their blueness. Bess tried to think, tried to remember where she had met those eyes before.

They had not smiled then, had not been kind. They had flashed with scorn and anger. Where could it have been, so long ago? Her own lids drooped. It was too much trouble to think, too much trouble to worry.

She had so often wakened in the same way before, when Dodson had struck her, and nothing mattered so long as she was not forced to see him again. Her whole bruised body shuddered as she remembered his brutality.

A soft hand touched hers. She lifted her eyes again with an effort.

"Do you feel better?"

Such a kind, gentle voice it was! Bess tried to answer, and now she was conscious of a terrible pain, sharp and stabbing, that seemed piercing her body like a cruel knife; it robbed her of breath and of all power to speak.

The dull breaking of the waves on the rocks was drowned for a moment by a cry of agony which, although she did not know it, came from her own lips. She felt herself slipping, slipping once again into darkness.

It was just a long dream after that, a long, strange dream from which she awakened now and then to find that sweet face still beside her. Sometimes there were other faces too; a kind, gray-haired man who looked like a doctor; a woman in a nurse's cap, and once Steve—poor Steve, with tears in his somber eyes.

She would have liked to speak to Steve, but it was so difficult—so very difficult; always when she tried, she went to sleep again and forgot all about it.

It was late at night on the second day following the accident that the doctor told Dacre that there was no hope of a recovery.

"There are internal injuries," he said. "And apart from that, she seems to have no desire for life. She'll just lie there and die. Poor soul!"

"Rotten hard luck, isn't it?" said Dacre with genuine feeling. "I'd give anything I possess if I could undo it. But she stepped right off the curb; she stepped right off and never looked to see if anything was coming!"

"It was purely an accident," said the doctor kindly.

Nora Lindsie came to and fro with a determination that puzzled both men. Mrs. Lindsie had raved and talked by the hour against her doing so, but without avail.

"It's indecent!" she declared violently. "What in the world has happened to you? First you go to that man Wharton's place and now you practically live at Randolph Dacre's!"

Nora flushed.

"Mr. Dacre is never there, and there is nothing indecent in visiting a dying woman."

"There are plenty of people paid by the city to visit dying women without your doing it!" retorted her mother tartly. "And she can't amount to much, seeing that her own husband never goes near her!"

"Her own husband is a brute!" said Nora.

Mrs. Lindsie spread her jeweled hands resignedly.

"Men are all brutes," she declared.

When Nora reached Randolph's apartment in the morning, Johns told her that Mrs. Dodson had been asking for her. Johns had behaved very well, considering; but to his circumspect soul, the whole proceedings savored of madness.

The woman should have been taken straight to the hospital, to his way of thinking. What were hospitals for? But after all Dacre was a good master, and good masters were worth humoring.

He shrugged his shoulders as he looked after Nora as she hurried to the room where Bess lay; there were queer goings on!

Bess lay on her side with fever-bright eyes fixed on the door as Nora entered. The nurse sat by the bed, but she rose immediately.

"Mrs. Dodson wishes to speak to you, Miss Lindsie."

She left the room quietly and shut the door behind her.

Nora took the seat she had vacated. She thought Bess had changed very much since the previous night. There was something indefinable about her that so often prefaces the coming of death; a pinched grayness of the delicate nostrils; a shadow over all the face, that looked somehow refined and almost beautiful with its new delicacy and without its disfiguring make-up.

"What is it?" Nora asked.

She was terribly sorry for this woman. From the little she herself had gleaned of her past life she knew what a tragedy it had been. Married to a man who would not even come to her when she lay dying!

Bess spoke with difficulty. The thin hand in Nora's twitched and shook, as if each word hurt her; but she persisted.

"I've been trying—to remember—all this time, and it's only just come to me. You're Miss Lindsie. I can remember now, and I went to see you. Well, nurse says I'm dying, so it can't matter what I say, can it? They can't hurt me any more! Jim can't hurt a dead woman, can he?"

"Oh, you poor soul! You poor soul!" cried Nora. Tears rushed to her eyes at the pitiful words. She stooped

Nora bent over the dying woman. "Bess, answer me! *Who killed Guy Stanton?*"

impulsively and kissed the wasted cheek. "If only I could do something for you! If only I could help you!"

"You have—helped me—you have done—a lot for me," said Bess weakly. "And that's why—before it's too late—I want to tell you. It was lies, all lies that I told you. You know what I mean. Jim made me—he and Steve. Poor Steve! He never was a bad boy till we knew Jim. They told me what to say. They sent me to you. First they tried Mr. Wharton, but he was too clever for them; it was no use trying to deceive him. So they sent me to you. I'm not Mr. Wharton's wife. I never was his wife! And the boy—the boy——" She broke off, gasping.

Nora was very pale. There was terror in her eyes. She longed and yet dreaded to hear what was coming.

"The—the boy?" she echoed.

"I don't understand," he said dully. "You say you care for Wharton?"

Bess turned her head wearily on the pillow.

"He's Guy Stanton's son!" she said hoarsely. "Stanton married my sister, years ago. He was ashamed of her when he got his money—but she was his wife, right enough! She died three years ago, and then—then Jim thought of the whole thing after Guy Stanton was murdered."

Nora shuddered.

"Not murdered!" she pleaded brokenly. "It was an accident! We all know it must have been an accident!"

Bess made no answer. For a moment she lay with closed eyes, almost as if the exertion of speaking had worn out her last frail hold on life. Nora sat with bowed head and clasped hands. Her whole soul was numbed and crushed.

George had told her but the simple truth, after all. The boy Sonnie *was* Guy's son.

Bess put out a feeble hand and touched hers.

"I couldn't die without telling you, Miss Lindsie." The dark eyes were wistful. "There's so little happiness in the world; and Jim—he said that Mr. Wharton loved you. He said he knew it months ago, before you were engaged to Mr. Stanton." The thin fingers tightened their grasp. "If you would just say that you forgive me?" pleaded the faltering voice.

"There isn't anything to forgive," said Nora dully. "It is I who must ask for forgiveness."

"There's—there's something else," Bess went on after a moment. Her dark eyes were roving round the room with a curiously blind look in their beauty. "I know there's many that say Mr. Wharton killed his friend." Her voice rose almost shrilly. "Don't you ever believe it! Don't ever believe it! He no more killed him than you did!"

Nora's face blanched. She drew away from the woman with a sort of frozen horror.

"You—you mean that you—*know* who did?" she asked in a whisper.

Bess seemed not to hear. She was wandering again, muttering to herself, her hands working convulsively.

Nora bent over the bed, grasping those hands in her own trembling clasp.

"Bess, Bess, answer me! Answer me! *Who murdered Guy Stanton?*"

There was a tragic silence. The restless eyes came back to Nora's face, rested there, clouded and uncertain. The pale lips moved as if to speak. And then there was a little gurgling, choking sound, a convulsive movement of the poor body that had been so beautiful.

Nora started to her feet. She rushed to the door.

"Nurse! Nurse!"

The nurse came in hurriedly. She

bent over the bed for an instant; then she looked up at Nora's ghastly face.

"She's dead, Miss Lindsie," she said pityingly. "Poor soul! Poor soul!"

CHAPTER XXV.

"I'VE ALWAYS LOVED HIM!"

As Nora left the room where Bess lay dead, she met Randolph Dacre in the little hall.

Nora was very white. She had a tired, worn look about her that went to the man's heart. He came toward her with outstretched hands, but she waved him away.

"Don't touch me; please don't. She is dead. Poor woman, she is dead."

She covered her face with her hands and began to sob.

She had never seen actual death before. It struck her with a sense of terror.

Dacre led her into the cozy room and closed the door.

"I begged you not to come any more," he said gently. "I knew what the end must be. She is well out of it at last, poor creature."

He looked around with a shiver. He would never care for the apartment again, he told himself; he would get rid of it as soon as possible. Perhaps after all Nora would marry him soon, and help him choose and furnish a house.

He stood beside her, gently stroking her hand, his handsome face very grave.

"Don't cry, dear," he said. "It's much better as it is, really! She was married to a brute. The man had never once been near her since the accident. I'd like to wring the fellow's neck!"

Nora freed her hand and dried her eyes.

"It seems such a shame," she said with a sob. "She was so young! She should have been so happy! Just at the last she tried to tell me something, something I would have given all I possess to know; but she died before she could say it, and perhaps she is the only person who will ever tell the truth about it all."

"About what, Nora?"

The girl started to her feet and began pacing the room.

"She said she knew who killed Guy Stanton. She said she wanted to tell me—she wanted to clear George Wharton's name. Oh, if only she had! If only she had!"

There was a passion of intensity in her voice. Dacre whitened.

"I wish she had," he said gently. "The poor chap's gone through enough. But perhaps she was only wandering. You must not put too much importance on what a dying woman says."

Nora flashed angry eyes at him.

"That is what every one will say, I suppose. What does the world care if an innocent man suffers? What does any one care so long as people have the excitement of doubt and suspicion? Oh, I would give my life if only I could know the truth!"

Dacre crossed the space her restless pacing had put between them, and caught her hands in a fierce grip.

"Do you know what you are making me believe?" he asked hoarsely. "Do you know what you are making me think? Nora! Nora! What are you saying? What is Wharton to you?"

There was a tragic silence. Then Nora flung up her head proudly.

"I love him," she said, and her eyes met his bravely, though her cheeks flamed. "Oh, I think I have always loved him, even when I was engaged to Guy! I should have told you, but somehow—— Oh don't, don't look like that!"

His face was ashen now. His eyes stared at her with blank unbelief. He dropped into a chair behind him, and passed a hand dazedly across his face.

"I—I'm afraid I don't understand," he said dully. "I'm afraid I'm very

stupid. You say you care for Wharton—for George Wharton? I—I never dreamed of such a thing."

Nora walked to the window and stood staring out with unseeing eyes. Presently she spoke harshly.

"You may as well know all the truth. I'm not trying to excuse myself, but—I can't marry you, and it's only fair you should know the whole story. I always loved George. Looking back now, it seems impossible that there was ever a time when I did not love him. It sounds dreadful, I know, but I believe I even became engaged to Guy so that I might have George for a friend. I didn't realize it then, and—oh, I am afraid I am hurting you horribly!"

"No, no. Go on."

"After—after Guy's death, Mr. Wharton never came near us. I asked him to, but he never did. And then I met him out one day, and I made him tell me he loved me. Yes, I did. I *made* him, and I am glad of it! He would never have spoken, but I just made him. He tried hard not to let me know. He talked about his life being under a cloud—that he was not fit to marry any woman; but I did not care. I should not have cared if I had known him to be guilty. Women are like that, I suppose.

"Then—then—oh, he never wrote to me, and I heard stories about him. You yourself told me that you had seen him with a little boy, and that you had heard that he was married. Then a woman I had never seen came to me with the same story, and nearly drove me mad. I tried hard not to listen; I tried hard to cling to my belief in him, but you don't know what it was! the doubt would not die, in spite of everything! And then—then I went to him." She drew a hard breath that was almost a sob as she remembered that last meeting.

"He would not deny it at first. The child was there—a dear little fellow; and I think I went mad with pain and jealousy. I drove him so far at last that he turned and told me that the boy was Guy's son!"

For the first time Dacre looked up.

"Guy's son!"

"Yes—and I didn't believe him. I told him it was a trumped-up story to shield himself. We had a terrible scene, and I have never seen him since. And to-day, only an hour ago, this woman told me that it was the truth. It was she who came to me and claimed to be George's wife. She told me that she was driven to tell the lie by the man who is really her husband. George has never been married. The boy is Guy's, and the boy's mother is dead. But it's too late now, too late! He'll never forgive me—and I shall never forgive myself."

There was hopeless finality in her voice. She had forgotten Dacre's presence, forgotten all but the one overwhelming fact that she had lost the man she loved, and by her own fault.

Silence reigned in the little room. Dacre rose to his feet.

"Come, I will take you home," he said.

He took up her cloak from a chair, and rang the bell for his man. Johns, with discreetly lowered lids, answered his summons.

"Send for a taxi, please."

Nora did not look round from the window, and Dacre stood some distance from her till the whirring of a motor in the street roused him.

He opened the door, and she passed silently out. She wanted to say something, to ask him to forgive her, but a glance at his set face silenced her.

In the face of such sorrow, what was the use of mere words?

They drove to Nora's home.

"You will come in, won't you?" she faltered.

But Dacre shook his head.

"No, thank you, not now. I will call in the morning, if I may."

He did not glance at her, did not even touch her hand, and she stood on the step looking after him with tears in her eyes until the taxi was swallowed up in the busy street.

Mrs. Lindsie was dressing for a theater when Nora went to her room. She looked radiant and handsome as she turned with a beaming smile to greet her daughter.

"Well, Nora, how is the patient?"

"Dead, mother."

Mrs. Lindsie screamed. She hated being startled. She had never really believed that the case was as serious as Nora and Dacre had declared. She seized a smelling bottle and sniffed at it vigorously.

"How abrupt you are!" she complained, closing her eyes. "You know how weak my heart is. Some day I shall drop dead when you burst in upon me with such horrors."

"I did not burst in upon you, and you asked me for news."

Nora looked at her mother and noticed that she was wearing a new and very elaborate gown.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Mrs. Lindsie hesitated. Then she rose to her feet and faced the girl with determination.

"I am going to the theater, with Granville Elder," she said.

"Mother! With the man you say you hate? The man to whom we owe all this money? How can you do such a thing?"

Mrs. Lindsie shrugged her plump shoulders.

"There is such a thing as holding a candle to the devil," she said philosophically. "And I have held mine so effectually that I am even going to marry him! Oh, you can stare! I'm tired of being poor and penniless. After all, he's quite a distinguished-looking man, even if he has a large nose; and he's enormously rich. It will be practically marrying a millionaire. He proposed to me yesterday. Of course I was amazed, simply amazed! I told him that I never thought of marrying again. But—well, it seemed the best way out of the difficulty. It's useless waiting for you to marry money, so I thought I would do it myself. Oh, it's quite a business arrangement, my dear. He will make a handsome settlement—trust me to see to that!—and of course all debts and obligations between us are canceled forever!"

Nora listened incredulously. Her eyes were horrified.

Mrs. Lindsie began to whimper.

"Of course I knew you'd be unkind about it! But after all, mine is a lonely life, and I'm not old nor unattractive. Of course, I shall never love Granville as I did your poor father; but he is quite content to know that, and he says we shall be very happy. We certainly ought to be if money can buy happiness—and it's such a load off my mind! Nora, the least you can do is to congratulate me!"

Nora bent and kissed the warm, powdered cheek.

"I hope you will be happy," she said mechanically. "Of course, you won't expect me to live with you?"

"My only child will always have a home with her mother if she cares to accept it," said Mrs. Lindsie with dignity. "But you must please yourself, and I have insisted on Granville's making provision for you."

"Mother! As if I could ever take his money!"

"His money is as good as any one else's!" said Mrs. Lindsie with exasperation. "And you can't live without it, so don't talk nonsense. And now run away. I want to finish dressing. Really I feel quite agitated. Whatever will dear Mrs. Dallas say when she

reads the announcement in to-morrow's *Times!*"

Nora walked out of the room. In spite of her amazement and a certain feeling of disgust, she could not help feeling relieved. Their debts would be discharged, and her mother comfortably settled. Henceforward she would be free to go her own way.

Mrs. Lindsie's maid, Esther, came up the stairs.

"There's a young man to see you, please, Miss Lindsie."

Nora started.

"To see me?"

"Yes, miss. He won't give any name, but it's to do with the young person that died this evening. That's what he told me to say."

"I will come at once."

Nora waited only to take off her hat; then she went quickly downstairs to the library.

A tall, thin young man with dark hair stood looking into the empty fireplace. He had stooping shoulders, and a sallow face just now disfigured with grief.

"You wished to speak to me," said Nora, advancing. "About—Mrs. Dodson?"

"Yes." His dark eyes sought her face with a shrewd scrutiny. "She was my sister," he said then unsteadily: "I am her brother Jim; she may have spoken of me."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"I BELIEVE I CAN FIND THE MURDERER."

The two days following his parting with Nora Lindsie were like a nightmare to George Wharton.

He went through the hours mechanically, spending most of his time with Sonnie. The boy was a distraction, and he was very fond of him.

But nothing seemed of much account now. Continual worry and strain and misery had deadened his heart and numbed all feeling.

Nora had gone—had walked out of his life forever. Well, it was better so. He had no right to take her love, no right to give her his. All along he had contemplated breaking with her, and now she had broken with him.

He tried not to think of the tears in her eyes as he had first seen her that afternoon; tried not to hear the echo of her broken pleading with him:

"Don't you love me after all, then?"

Love her! Had he not always loved her? Would he not love her to his dying day?

He often spent his afternoons in the little room which had been set apart for Sonnie. The boy would amuse himself for hours with a box of soldiers set up stiffly in a row, firing at them with paper pellets from a toy gun.

"I've just killed the king," he announced gravely one afternoon. "I didn't mean to, but he got in the way. That's him, on the white horse." He scrambled to his feet. "When is the pretty lady comin' again?" he asked. He had never forgotten Nora.

"She won't come again," said George.

"She was c'yin'," said Sonnie. He sucked his thumb and stared solemnly.

"Was she, old chap?"

"What did she cry for, eh?"

George moved away. He could not bear this innocent cross-questioning.

"How would you like to go over the sea, Sonnie?" he asked irrelevantly.

Sonnie considered.

"In a big ship?" he inquired.

"Yes."

"With you, too?"

"Oh, yes. I should come, too."

"And Lucy?"

"No, we couldn't very well take Lucy; and I don't suppose she would want to come."

"I'll ask her," said Sonnie promptly. He made for the door, but George called him back.

"Never mind, old chap. Lucy's busy."

"Oh!"

The child returned obediently. He got down on the floor again, and picked up the fallen king.

"He wasn't deaded, after all," he said, meeting the man's eyes.

George sat down on a chair by the window and watched the boy wistfully. Every day he seemed to find in the little fellow a fresh likeness to the dead man; every day he marveled more that he had not seen it from the very beginning. There were little tricks of manner, little turns of the head.

A wry smile twisted his lips as he thought of the child as his own. That Nora should believe the absurd story filled him with amazement. She had trusted him on the other, graver charge, when all the world had looked at him with suspicion, but now——

He tried to shake off the memory. It was best to forget it all; best to remember it only as a dream that was too beautiful ever to come true.

Two days later he went down to the shipping offices, and booked two passages to England.

On the way back he called on Fraser Courtenay and told him what he had done. The lawyer spread his little fat hands deprecatingly.

"You are taking the child?"

"Yes."

"For how long?"

"I don't know. I shall leave some of the servants at the house. I can't stay on in New York. It's driving me mad!"

"Humph! Have you heard that Mrs. Lindsie is marrying Elder, the money lender?"

"Nonsense! Why, she hates him!"

"Possibly. She's marrying him, anyway."

"Good heavens!" George knew Granville Elder, and knew little that was good of him.

"He's practically a millionaire," said Courtenay tentatively.

Wharton laughed.

"There'll be money enough in the family at last, then. I understand the daughter is to marry Dacre, Randolph Dacre."

"I have not heard that."

"No? Well, it's true. He told me himself. He asked me not to mention it, so don't let it go any farther."

"No." The little man eyed George sharply. "That woman, Bess Dodson, is dead," he said suddenly.

"Dead!"

"Yes. It was an accident, I believe. I saw a short account of it in the paper this morning. Run over by a taxi."

"Poor thing!" George thought of the dark, tragic face and frightened eyes of the woman who had been only the instrument in a master hand. "Poor thing!" he said again.

"Yes. By the way, did you know that she was Dodson's wife?"

"Dodson? What Dodson? Not——"

"Yes. The butler Guy thought so much of."

"Then that would account for——"

"Yes." The little lawyer leaned suddenly forward across the table. *"Don't go to England yet,"* he said impressively.

George stared in amazement. "Why on earth——"

"Because," said Courtenay, "I believe I can find the man who murdered Guy Stanton!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"SHE MARRIED A BRUTE!"

For a moment a look of amazement and hope flashed into George Wharton's weary face. An eager light dawned in his eyes as he stared incredulously down at the lawyer, but it vanished almost as soon as it had come, giving place to the old despondency.

"You'll be a clever man if you can

do that, Mr. Courtenay," he said nonchalantly. "I knew Stanton best, and as far as I can fathom, he hadn't an enemy in the world; certainly no one who would wish him out of the way——"

"Well, well," said the little man soothingly, "perhaps you're right, but I have my own theory about the matter. If you'll wait a week or two, perhaps only a few days—will you promise me this?"

"Yes." Wharton took up his hat. His old listless manner had returned. He had no real hope in his heart that there was anything in what Fraser Courtenay had said; he had reached that point where nothing seemed of much consequence. Even were he cleared of suspicion, who would care? Nobody!

He went past the Lindsies' house. He glanced up at the windows and quickly away again. Nora had soon forgotten him, if it was true that she and Randolph Dacre were engaged. He had lost everything worth having in life.

Nora was in the drawing-room at that moment, if he had only known it, with Bess Dodson's brother Stephen.

Stephen looked very ill. His dark eyes were sunken in his thin face; a hectic spot of color burned on his high cheek bones.

"I've come to thank you for what you did for my sister, Miss Lindsie," he said. As he spoke, his eyes wandered round the room. He fidgeted with his hat. "I don't know why you took so much trouble to help her, poor girl." Something like a sob broke his voice. "Thank God she's out of it!" he added fiercely.

Nora felt very sorry for him. Perhaps he himself had not been so kind to the dead woman as he might have been, and yet she could see what grief her death had caused him.

"Her life was a hell!" he went on passionately. "She was married to a brute—yes, and worse than a brute. Some day I'll have a chance to pay him back, and then—well, then he'd better look out!"

"You mean Dodson. He was Mr. Stanton's butler, I think," said Nora.

The young man laughed grimly.

"That's the man. He married Bess only because he knew the little boy was Mr. Stanton's. He saw there was a fine blackmailing game there, and Bess was always as weak as water. I had my share in it, too, I'm not denying; but somehow, since I've seen her lying there dead——" He stopped again.

"She spoke of you most kindly," said Nora gently. "She never blamed you for anything that happened, I am sure. She seemed so anxious to put everything right before she died. There was something she tried to tell me, but she could not. Oh, I wish I had known what it was!"

She walked a few paces agitatedly. Stephen watched her from under his dark brows.

His sister's death had been a blow to him. It had shaken him to a realization of the downward path he was treading, had brought him back to a shamed sense of his manhood.

"If there is anything I can do for you, Miss Lindsie," he said awkwardly, "I shall be only too glad. You were kind to Bess, and I shan't forget it."

Nora's cheeks flamed.

"Perhaps some day I shall ask you to remember that promise," she said, and, impulsively held out her hand.

Stephen went back to the empty house where he and Bess had lived. There was a neglected, uncared-for look about it. Some of the blinds were crookedly drawn; the steps had not been cleaned for days; the letter box was stuffed with circulars, and a few letters.

He let himself into the house and opened some windows. He felt horribly depressed. A hat and coat of the

dead woman's hung in the hall. A pair of worn, high-heeled shoes lay on the rug in the sitting room.

The life of misery and bullying she had known there was over. Dodson had lifted his hand to her for the last time. Dead or living, she would never come back there any more.

On the table under the window lay a white envelope pinned to the cloth. It was addressed to him in pencil. Stephen took it up curiously.

The contents were roughly scrawled in pencil.

I have been back here three times to see you. Am coming again this afternoon, so you'd better wait.

There was no signature, but he knew it was from Jim Dodson.

His thin mouth took an ugly fold. He was no longer afraid of the bully who had ruined his sister's life. He tossed the note into the empty grate, and glanced at his watch. It was nearly three o'clock now; Jim could not be long. He drew up the blind and sat down to wait.

Ten minutes passed, and then he heard the sound of a latchkey in the door and a heavy tread in the passage.

Dodson came into the room with his hat on. He looked surly and ill-tempered.

"So you've come at last," he said with a growl. "Where've you been for the past week?"

Stephen rose to his feet.

"Where you ought to have been—with Bess."

Dodson leered.

"Bess! Bess! I'm sick of her and her whinings! She'd better keep away from me after the way she's done her best to queer my game. I was a fool ever to put any confidence in her. Women are no use when it's a matter of business."

Stephen's dark eyes flamed.

"She'll keep away from you right enough," he said. "She's dead."

For a moment there was a tragic silence. Dodson's fat face grew pallid; he moistened his dry lips.

"Dead!" he echoed in a hoarse whisper.

"Yes," said Stephen, "thank God!

"You were there the night he was killed! You saw him murdered!"

Thank God that she's rid of you and your devilish ways!"

Dodson sat down heavily by the table. In spite of himself, he thought of her as she had been when they first met, young and handsome and happy—and as he had last seen her, lying bruised and hysterical on the couch in that very room.

For a moment he could find no words. Then he laughed harshly.

"Well, so much the better for us, you and me," he said. "She'd have queered us all if we'd let her! Look here, I have some business to propose to you."

He turned in his chair, leaning his arms on the table. Stephen did not move.

"There's still money to be had out of this game," Dodson went on. "I found out that Miss Lindsie and Wharton have been meeting on the Q. T. You know what that means! And now I hear that she's to marry Dacre. You know Dacre—big swell in his way; not the man to put up with scandal attached to his wife's name." He paused suggestively. "Get me?" he asked coarsely.

"You mean," said Stephen slowly, "that I'm to go to Miss Lindsie and suggest that she pay for you to hold your tongue?"

Dodson leaned back in his chair.

"Steve, my boy, you're coming along fine!" he said mockingly. "You've hit the nail on the head first time. That's the game. You're a nice-looking young fellow, you know; just the sort to get round a woman like that. Soft-hearted, she is. I hear she's been hanging round Bess, eh?"

"She was an angel to her," said Stephen. He still spoke in the same quiet tone, but his eyes burned.

"Well," said Dodson uneasily, "you tackle the angel, and you shan't regret it." He wished he had not referred again to Bess. He glanced uncomfortably round the neglected room that spoke so eloquently of her presence; almost it seemed as if the door must open to admit her. He shuffled to his feet.

"You'd better get busy on the job to-day," he said.

Stephen did not move.

"D'ye hear?" growled Dodson.

"Yes," answered the younger man. "I heard, and I'll do the job to-day."

He took up his hat. Dodson spoke as he reached the door.

"I'll be here when you come back, and look sharp!"

Stephen left the room.

He walked till he was about a mile from the house. Then he took a cab and gave an address, but it was not the address where Nora Lindsie lived. And when the cab stopped and he got out, he found himself in front of an office building downtown.

He consulted the directory in the lobby, and found the name of Fraser Courtenay; then he took the elevator to the tenth floor.

The office boy was not at all sure that Mr. Courtenay could see this shabby young man who looked so ill, but Stephen insisted.

"You take my card in. He'll see me all right."

The lad obeyed, grumbling. He returned in a moment to show Stephen into the inner office.

Mr. Courtenay was standing by the window. There was an air of suppressed eagerness about him.

"You got my letter, then?" he said.

"Yes, this morning. What do you want with me?"

The question was abrupt. Stephen was beginning to look uneasy.

The little fat man placed his plump hands on the table between them.

"I want to tell you," he said slowly, "that I know who murdered Guy Stanton."

Stephen did not move. His face turned sickly. He cast a quick look behind him toward the door.

"You need not be afraid," said Mr. Courtenay smoothly. "No one's going to hurt you, but for your own sake I warn you to be careful. I know a great deal more than you think I do. I knew years ago that Dodson—ah, you start! —had discovered about poor Stanton's unfortunate marriage, and was attempting blackmail. Stanton came to me on the matter. Then his wife died, and for a time the persecution stopped. I advised him to get rid of Dodson, but you knew as well as I do that he would never take advice, and Dodson stayed on.

"Then he became engaged to Miss Lindsie, and Dodson began his little tricks again. He threatened to tell Miss Lindsie of the existence of the child. Personally, I cannot see that it would have mattered in the least, but apparently Stanton thought different. I know that he paid over a large sum of money for Dodson to hold his tongue. It was a weak move, and of course the blackmailing never ceased. And now we come down to the night of the murder."

Stephen winced. He took a step backward as if to ward off a blow.

"And this is where you can tell me any facts I do not at present know," said Mr. Courtenay suavely. "If you are wise, you will do as I suggest."

"I know nothing about it. How should I? I hardly knew Stanton. I was never at his house," stammered the young man. He was livid now. "You can't prove anything against me!"

"I've no intention of trying," answered the little man gently. "I wish to prove nothing against you except that you were in poor Stanton's house on the night he was killed, and that you saw him murdered!"

"It's a lie!" said Stephen hoarsely.

He had backed against the door, and stood there with fear in every line of his figure.

He rushed on into incoherent speech.

"I never saw him murdered! I don't know that he *was* murdered! I refuse to make any statement."

"Very well." Mr. Courtenay sat down in his big chair with a shrug of his shoulders. "I asked you here because I wished to befriend you and give you a chance to save yourself. I knew your sisters. I liked them. For their sakes, and for the trouble they had in their lives, poor souls, I would wish to help you."

His eyes grew suddenly fierce. "Perhaps you have forgotten the little affair of a forged note some—five years ago, was it? Ah, I see you have not! You were lucky to escape then, young man, I can tell you! It is quite within my power even now to hand you over to the law on that count. But I have no wish to do so, providing you will tell me what I wish to know about the night of Guy Stanton's murder. Were you, or were you not, in the house at the time?"

For an instant Stephen hesitated. Then he flung up his head.

"Yes," he said defiantly, "I was."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TRACKED.

There was perhaps no more miserable man in the whole of New York during the days which followed the death of Bess Dodson than Randolph Dacre.

For the first time in his selfish, careless life, he knew the meaning of the word unhappiness. The dreams he had dreamed would never be realized. Nora not only did not but never would love him. She had accepted his affection very much as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

Possibly she would marry him, but was it worth it? Would there be any happiness for him with a wife who merely turned an unresponsive cheek for his kisses?

For two days he never went near the Lindsies. He lived at the club, smoked more than was good for him, sat up all night, and slept the sleep of utter exhaustion during the day in the vain hope of drowning his sorrow.

But the third day all that was best in him triumphed over the reckless despondency, and made him ashamed.

After all, Wharton was a better man than he. If Nora must love some one else, he was not at all sure that he would not choose poor old Wharton. The man had had enough trouble to send him completely under; he deserved some happiness by way of recompense.

Dacre recalled his own blundering confession at the club the night after he had asked Nora to marry him, and no longer wondered that Wharton had gone so white. He cursed himself for a stupid idiot as he lay in bed, blinds close-drawn to keep out the sunshine which he could not face for a racking headache.

"Let the best man win," he told himself grimly. After all, it would all be the same in a hundred years' time.

But, unfortunately, it is not the next century that matters so much as the immediate present; and it took real grit and determination for him to make up his mind to go round and have it out with Wharton himself.

If these two, George and Nora, loved each other, why had they drifted apart? He felt sure there was some mystery beyond what Nora herself had told him.

He felt ill and nervous as he submitted to the ministrations of his valet. He was irritable, and found fault with everything the man did. Luckily Johns was used to gentlemen of all moods, and took no notice; but as he assisted his master into his smart gray morning coat he ventured a piece of information.

"They are saying, sir, that Mr. Stanton's murderer has been found."

"Stanton's murderer? Who says he was murdered?" Dacre snapped. "It was never proved. Of course it's not true. Who've you been chattering with?"

The man's expressionless face did not change. He brushed an imaginary speck of dust from his master's sleeve.

"One of the maids downstairs, sir, told me that the paper has full details."

Dacre said, "Rubbish!" He dismissed the story from his mind and drove off to Wharton's place.

Lucy opened the door to him; she looked frightened and pale. "Mr. Wharton is not in, sir. I don't know when he will be."

"Oh well, I suppose I can wait?"

"Oh yes, sir! But——" She hesitated, seemed about to make some observation, then changed her mind and stood aside for him to enter. She showed him into the cool drawing-room, shut the door and left him.

Dacre hated waiting. He hated his own company. He was positively relieved when after a few moments the door was opened a cautious inch, and a child's shock head was thrust in.

"'Lo!" said a doubtful voice.

"Hello!" said Dacre.

He got up from the couch and crossed the room.

"Come in, little man!"

Sonnie obeyed.

"George is out," he said confidentially.

"Yes, so I hear. I'm waiting to see him."

"Oh!" Sonnie regarded him with solemn eyes. "What's a hero?" he demanded after a moment.

Dacre sat down again, drawing the child closer to him.

"A hero?" he said, puzzled to know how to explain it. "Well, a hero's a brave man. Suppose you fell into a pond, and I fished you out; I should be a hero—at least, I suppose so," he added doubtfully.

"Would it be deep?" asked Sonnie interestedly.

Dacre rubbed his chin.

"Well, it all depends. Deep enough to drown you, anyway——"

"Oh!" There was another pause, longer this time. "Lucy says that George is a hero," he declared presently. "*Is* George a hero?"

Dacre looked perplexed.

"I don't know," he said at last.

"Oh, why don't you know?"

The insistent questioning was becoming embarrassing. Dacre tried to turn the conversation by producing his watch and opening the works, but Sonnie had seen that done heaps of times before, and was not to be diverted.

"A wicked man killed my daddy," he said gravely.

Dacre started. His eyeglass fell from his eye with a tinkle against his waistcoat buttons.

"You mustn't say that," he said severely. "Has Lucy been talking to you?"

"No, I hearded it," said the child. His big brown eyes grew wistful. "My daddy was nice," he said. "He used to read books to me, and show me pictures. There was a story about a little dwarf." He broke off as some one tapped at the door.

"If that's Lucy, I'm going to stay here with you," he announced calmly.

It was Lucy. She came in, flushed and excited.

"Please, sir, Mr. Wharton's just come in."

Dacre rose to his feet, putting the child gently aside. He had the uncomfortable feeling which one experiences in a dentist's waiting room. He cleared his throat vigorously, and jerked at his smart waistcoat.

"Does he know I am here?" he asked. "Does he—— Ah, here he is!"

Wharton came into the room. One glance at him, and Dacre felt all his courage and determination oozing out at his finger tips.

There was some indefinable change about Wharton. He looked younger; he held his shoulders more erect. The haggard look was not so painfully visible on his face.

"Lucy says George is a hero," confided Sonnie.

He carried a newspaper crumpled in his hand. Sonnie ran to him eagerly, only to be gently put aside.

"Take the boy away, Lucy."

When the door had closed on the child's protesting figure, Wharton spoke.

"You've heard, of course?"

"Heard what?"

"That they've found Stanton's murderer?"

"Good heavens, no!" Dacre had quite forgotten Johns' story of an hour earlier. He had not troubled to buy a paper, and the news came as a blow to him. For a moment he stared at Wharton speechlessly; then he held out his hand.

"By Jove, I am glad! I always knew it would come out right. Who is the

scamp? How on earth did they catch him?"

"It was Dodson, the butler."

"Good heavens!"

Dacre dropped limply into the chair behind him, real horror in his face. "*That* chap! I always disliked the look of him. The way he treated that poor woman! But you don't know about that, do you?"

"I think I know everything there is to know—now. It all seems so unreal, as if it cannot be true. Every moment I think I'm bound to wake up and find it's all been a dream."

Wharton spoke jerkily. He looked overstrung and excited.

Dacre watched him with unhappy eyes. Each moment it was getting harder to say the thing he had come to say. He knew quite well that if he put it off much longer, it would never be said at all. Suddenly he burst out impulsively:

"By Jove! Won't Miss Lindsie be delighted?"

Wharton stopped dead. He had been pacing up and down the room.

"Miss Lindsie!" he echoed. "Oh—oh, yes! She's always been very kind. I believe she always thought I was innocent."

Came another silence. Dacre ran a finger round his collar as if he was almost choking.

"Look here, old chap," he said unevenly, "it's no use throwing dust in my eyes. You said just now that you know everything there is to know, but you don't. You don't know that there's nothing between—me and Nora; that it was all rot, what I told you. She never cared a hang for me. She was just miserable and wanted a friend. I was fool enough not to see what she really meant. When that woman, Dodson's wife, died, she let it out. She told me the whole thing—Nora did, I mean. She said that there had been a misunderstanding between you about the little chap.

"No, you've got to listen"—as George would have stopped him. "Hang it, man, you don't think I like coming here and handing over the woman I love, do you?" he demanded fiercely. "It was just a toss-up if I ever said a word about it at all. But, after all, her happiness is the chief thing, eh?"

Wharton made no answer, and Dacre rattled on rapidly and incoherently.

"I don't know what happened between you, nor anything except what she's told me; but I'm not such a fool that I can't see that there was more than the affair of the boy in it. It's not my business of course, but——"

"I could never have married any woman while that cloud hung over me," said Wharton slowly. He seemed dazed, as if he could not realize all that had happened during the past few hours. "Nora, God bless her, would have taken me in spite of everything, but I could never have done it. And now——"

"Now," said Dacre, "there's no reason why you can't marry Nora and live together happily ever after, as they say in story books."

He spoke with forced cheerfulness, but there was a grim line about his handsome mouth. Suddenly he started to his feet.

"Tell us about Dodson. Dash it all! I'd go and assist at that man's execution with the greatest pleasure in the world, that I would."

"It's a long story," said Wharton. "Fraser Courtenay, the lawyer, sifted it all out. He's a smart man; he's been a good friend to me. Well, it appears that all along he suspected Dodson. He knew of money transactions between him and Guy, and apparently he made four out of two and two. It will all come out at the trial, I suppose, so I won't bore you with the details.

"There was another man in it, a brother of the woman who posed as Sonnie's mother—a weak sort of lad from all accounts, and entirely under Dodson's thumb. They'd tried the blackmailing game before. They knew what a peculiar chap Guy was, how he hated the idea of his marriage being made public, and they worked on his feelings. This other man, Steve, as they call him, gave the whole game away in a fright. Courtenay had some hold over him, knew of something he had done in the past, and frightened him into telling about Dodson. I believe he hates the man, really. He seems to blame him for his sister's death; the man was a beast to her from all accounts.

"Anyway, he confessed the whole thing in Courtenay's office. The night Guy died—after I had left him—Steve and Dodson went into the room and attempted their blackmailing tricks again. It appears that Guy had a large sum of money in the house, and the two scoundrels knew it. There wasn't much that Dodson didn't know in those days about Guy's private concerns.

"Guy had had enough of them, apparently, and told them so; he'd just became engaged, if you remember. There was a row, and from what Steve says, Guy made a rush for the door—he was rather a timid fellow, you know; never could stand up for himself. He shouted for help—Dodson had been threatening him, and there was a struggle——" Wharton's voice faltered.

"You can imagine the rest," he said with a shudder. "You know what a dangerous staircase that is. They flung him over. Steve swears Dodson did it, and I believe him. Murder was not intended, but they were all roused, and—it's horrible to think of, much more to speak about."

He looked white and sick. He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Poor chap! Poor chap!" said Dacre in a horrified voice. "And you say they've already arrested Dodson?"

"Yes. Steve took them to his house in the Bronx where he was waiting. He made an awful fight for it, but they've got him, and Courtenay says that he'll get the chair for murder."

"And," added Dacre huskily, "the prince will marry the princess, and they'll both live happily ever after—eh?"

Wharton smiled sadly, shaking his head. He did not believe that things would ever come right again between himself and Nora.

Looking back now on all that had happened, he blamed himself. He had not treated her fairly; he was not worthy of her. And yet how he loved her! His first thought when he heard of Dodson's arrest had been that Nora would know he had been innocent.

"It's very good of you to have come," he said constrainedly. He wished Dacre would go. He wanted to be alone.

"Not at all, not at all!" said Dacre laconically. He pulled himself up from the sofa, and stuck his monocle in his eye with a helpless sort of gesture.

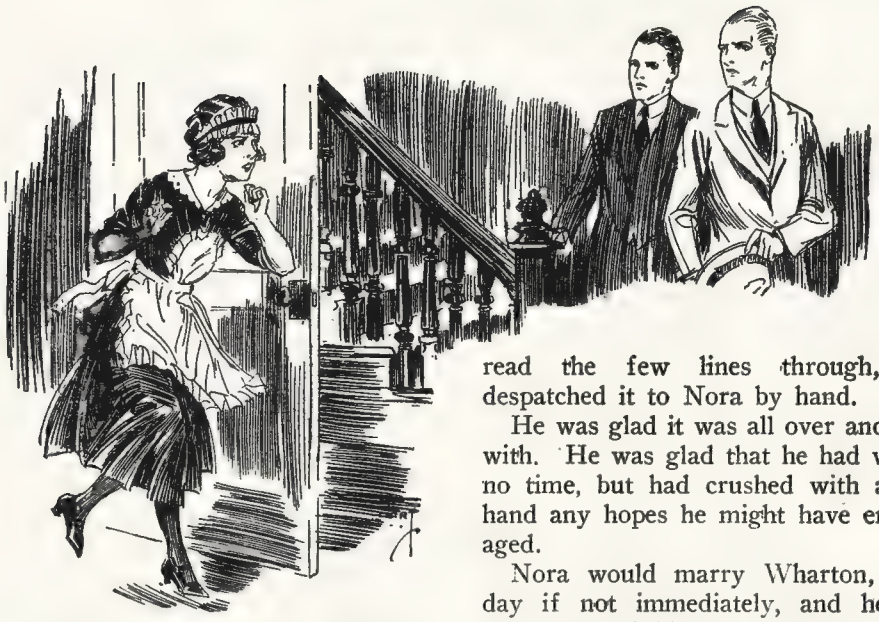
It had been probably the most noble action of his whole rather ineffective life. To relinquish Nora required an almost superhuman strength.

This love was the most ennobling thing that had ever happened to him. For this sweet girl he was going to sacrifice all that was dear in the world to him.

He felt very miserable and lonely, and yet he was glad that he had done the right thing, glad that Nora would lose no happiness through any fault of his.

"I think I'll be going," he said lamely.

The two men shook hands, and Wharton walked to the door with him. As they crossed the hall, Lucy ran screaming from the servants' quarters.



"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!" gasped the terrified Lucy. "It's Mr. Dodson, sir!"

"Oh, sir! Oh, sir!" She burst into terrified sobs when she saw Wharton. For some minutes she could not speak.

Dacre shook her arm impatiently. Wharton asked an agitated question.

"What is it? Has anything happened to Master Sonnie?"

"No, sir! No, sir! Oh, it's Mr. Dodson, sir!"

"Dodson?" cried both men together.

"Yes, sir. The chauffeur's just come and told us, sir; he's killed hisself as they was taking him to prison, sir! Oh, dear!" And Lucy fainted.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DON'T LET HIM GO!"

Dacre went back to his room, and wrote a letter to Nora.

I have not been to see you because a man does not deliberately hurt himself past bearing. Be happy, my dear, and in your happiness I shall find my own.

That was all. He sealed and addressed the envelope without daring to read the few lines through, and despatched it to Nora by hand.

He was glad it was all over and done with. He was glad that he had wasted no time, but had crushed with a firm hand any hopes he might have encouraged.

Nora would marry Wharton, some day if not immediately, and he was glad, he told himself loyally. It was true that in her happiness he would find his own.

Men at the club that evening remarked how lively old Dacre was.

"Come into a fortune?" one of them asked jokingly. "Or going to be married, or what?"

Dacre laughed, not very mirthfully. He wondered what sort of consternation it would cause if he gave way to the desperate longing in his heart to throw himself down on the floor and weep like a brokenhearted woman. The idea made him laugh again. He got up and left the room.

Dodson's sensational arrest and subsequent suicide was a nine days' wonder. The papers wrote of nothing else; people talked of nothing else. In the clubs, in trains, in offices, there was little else discussed.

The Stanton murder was on every lip. George was the hero of the hour.

He was seen very little about town during those days. He hated the publicity of popularity as much as he had disliked the notoriety of the police court; he longed to forget it all.

Pride kept him away from Nora Lindsie. He did not believe that she cared anything for him. He had not the least intention of making any overture to her.

He read in the papers one morning of her mother's marriage to Granville Elder. The description of the wedding breakfast at one of the smartest hotels filled a whole column. There was a flattering photograph of the bride, and a most unflattering one of the groom; but none of the accounts he read mentioned Nora. He wondered miserably what she was doing.

He had not seen Dacre since the morning of Dodson's arrest. He sometimes imagined that he had won Nora back after all, but he never went out of his way to make inquiries.

Sonnie asked for Nora once.

"Where's the pretty lady?"

Wharton flushed.

"I don't know, chappie," he said. "She won't come to see us any more."

"Why?" asked Sonnie, with his usual thirst for information. "Doesn't she like our house?"

Wharton laughed mirthlessly.

"She doesn't like me," he said.

The boy regarded him with scornful pity.

"How silly!" he said.

And the days dragged on, and Nora made no sign.

Ever since Wharton's name had been cleared, Nora had simply lived for him to come to her. She was sure that he must know there was no longer any obstacle between them. Much as she longed to write to him, the memory of the other letter she had written on the loving impulse of the moment kept her back. She could not risk rebuff and humiliation a second time.

She went to her mother's wedding because Mrs. Lindsie cried and made such a scene when she refused. She kissed her with real warmth when the moment for parting came, and said she hoped she would be happy. Mrs. Lindsie wept again—as delicately as she could, for fear of spoiling her careful make-up.

"Oh, I shall be!" she declared, sobbing picturesquely. "Granville is so good—and so rich. If only you could find a nice husband, Nora!"

Nora shook her head.

"No, thank you, mother." But she felt heart sore and lonely when she went back to the big house. It seemed as if all her life was to be like this; there was no one who wanted her, no one whose happiness was bound up in hers.

She had helped Steve, Bess Dodson's brother, to go West. Money was all people ever wanted of her, was the bitter thought in her mind when he came to say good-by to her.

He looked very ill and unhappy, and seemed humbled and grateful. All his rude, suspicious manner was gone. He had had his lesson; he had learned it in a hard school.

Nora shook hands with him when he bade her good-by.

"I can never thank you for what you have done for me," he said with emotion. "I only hope some day you will be rewarded with great happiness."

Nora paled.

"You are very kind," she said. She drew her hand away.

He half moved to the door, then came back.

"Miss Lindsie, I heard to-day, quite by chance from Mr. Courtenay, that—that Mr. Wharton is sailing next week."

He did not look at her, for which she was devoutly thankful.

"Indeed?" she said. Her voice shook horribly. She felt as if all the blood were drained from her heart.

"So Mr. Courtenay says." Steve spoke quickly. "Miss Lindsie, don't let him go! He's such a good fellow! I beg your pardon if I seem impertinent,

but he's been so good to me through all this trouble. Don't let him go!"

He spoke so simply and earnestly it was impossible to be angry. Nora held her hand to him again impulsively and said:

"I am not angry, and—thank you."

He went away then and left her alone in the splendor of the big drawing-room, torn with conflicting emotions.

George was sailing next week! Did that mean that he no longer wanted her? Or did it mean that he was waiting for her to make the first overture?

She could not decide. She wrote a note to him, and then tore it up. Why should she write?

Once she had written to him, and he had never answered her. Suppose the same thing happened again?

But after all, love is stronger than pride, and after many vain attempts she wrote another note, short and noncommittal:

DEAR MR. WHARTON: I hear you are leaving America. Can you spare a few moments to come and see me on a business matter before you go? Yours sincerely,

NORA LINDSIE.

She read through what she had written, and laughed. What bald words, when her whole heart was longing for him, when her whole soul seemed fainting with the eloquence of what she would say to him if he came!

Again the cowardly feeling overwhelmed her. Should she or should she not send it?

Finally she folded it and thrust it into an envelope, as if afraid of herself. She rang for a servant.

"Take this to Mr. Wharton, please—you know the address—and deliver it into his own hands. Don't leave it with the servant.

"I shall know he has it then, at least," she told herself with a sob, as she turned away and sat down to wait for George's answer.

CHAPTER XXX.

UNITED AT LAST.

When George received Nora's note, he was busy in the study he and Guy Stanton had once shared together, tearing up letters and papers.

If the clearing up of the murder and Dodson's subsequent suicide had relieved the load on his mind, it had not made him look happier. He looked worn and ill as he sat there in the sunshine, and destroyed the packets of letters and papers which the dead man had left behind him.

On the front of the house there was a "To Let" sign. All the servants were under notice. Up in the improvised nursery Sonnie was spending his days packing boxes of absurdly useless things which "me and George" were going to take to London.

He trotted up and downstairs from George to Lucy, chattering all the time, explaining gravely that he was so busy he couldn't stop, tying up wonderful parcels in odd bits of paper wound about with string and knots which could never have been unraveled.

"Bless his pretty face!" said Lucy tearfully.

She had offered to go with Wharton and the boy, but George had declined. He said, with a man's ignorance of the amount of attention a child requires, that he could manage quite well.

"And who'll mend the blessed lamb's little socks?" Lucy complained bitterly down in the kitchen; "and sew the buttons on his clothes, bless him? I'd like to see the master trying to!"

But such matters had no place in Wharton's mind as he destroyed papers and letters, and wondered drearily what future lay in store for him.

He had just finished his task and risen to his feet with a sigh of weariness when Nora's note was brought to him. He knew whose writing it was, although he had never had a letter from

her before, and his lean face flushed as he broke the dainty seal.

He half smiled at the curt little summons.

"The bearer is waiting for an answer, sir."

George hesitated. He was afraid to believe that this was a timid little olive branch held out to him by the trembling hand of the woman he loved.

He scribbled a couple of lines.

DEAR MISS LINDSIE: Thank you for your note. I shall be pleased to call and see you after dinner this evening, if it will be quite convenient. I leave for England on Friday. Sincerely yours, GEORGE WHARTON.

From the window he watched the servant carry his reply away. He wished he had not said that he would go; it would only be painful to them both.

He told himself now, when the shadow of a great happiness to come lay at his feet, that he did not intend to forgive Nora for her distrust. He told himself that she had killed his love for her; that he intended to be perfectly happy with the boy Sonnie in a strange country across the sea.

But love does not die so easily. In spite of himself Wharton felt a strange tremor as he read that halting little letter again. He began to remember Nora as she had looked that day in the park, to remember what she had said to him —that he had kissed her. He had never cared for any other woman, and yet now he was deliberately severing himself from her forever.

Sonnie, stamping into the room, put an end to his thoughts. He carried a worn little pair of slippers of his own. His chubby face was flushed and angry, his eyes fierce as he looked up at George.

"Lucy says you won't let me take my slippers!" he said indignantly.

George smiled down at him.

"They're worn out, old chap," he objected.

"They're not! They're very good! I did them up, and Lucy went and frew them way!" He hugged the shabby slippers to his little breast. "I don't like Lucy!" he declared.

George went upstairs with him to the nursery. The little feet stumped manfully along beside him. The shrill little voice kept up indignant expostulations all the way.

George stayed in the nursery till Sonnie's bedtime. He assisted with his bath, and took off his coat and rolled up his shirtsleeves to give him a lesson in "swimming." But no powers of persuasion could induce Sonnie to take his foot off the bottom of the tub, and he clung tightly to George's wrist.

"Don't be afraid, old chap," Wharton protested. "I won't let you go."

"I'm *not* 'fraid!" said Sonnie indignantly; but he heaved a sigh of relief when he was lifted out and rolled up in the big bath towel.

"I asked you to come," she said, "because we shall never meet again."

George said good night to him and went down to his solitary dinner. It was half-past eight when at last he got into his coat and went out into the summer night.

Such a beautiful night it was. The clear sky was star-studded; a soft breeze blew gently. Wharton took off his hat and let the air fan his forehead.

He felt absurdly nervous. When at length he found himself near the Lindsies' house he stood quite still, staring at the lighted windows, afraid to go in.

There was a light in the drawing-room, and one of the windows was open. Once he thought he saw the shadow of a woman's figure pass the blind, and his heart beat chokingly in his throat. He walked on a step or two, and then came back again.

After all, why not go in? He had said he would, and she would be expecting him. He walked up the steps and rang the bell.

The servant admitted him immediately and took him across the hall to the drawing-room. Some one was playing the piano softly, but the sound stopped at the opening of the door. Nora rose from the stool.

She wore a white frock—it was the first time he had seen her in anything but black since Guy Stanton's death—and there was a single pink rose at her breast.

She was very pale, but she came forward composedly and shook hands with him.

"It is very good of you to come," she said.

And Wharton said, "Not at all. I was pleased to come," and sat down feeling as if all the strength had been knocked out of him.

Nora went back to a big chair near the fireplace.

"I asked you to come," she said in a low voice, "because if you are going away, we may never meet again, and—and I want to ask your pardon."

She did not look at him, but his eyes were fixed on her delicate face. He could see the sweep of her long lashes, the little fluttering pulse in her throat.

"There is no reason why you should ask my pardon," said Wharton gently. "And I cannot allow it. It is I who should——"

She interrupted him with a gesture, and rose and took a letter from the mantel and handed it to him.

"Will you read that?"

He took the letter hesitatingly. It was written on very thick, expensive-looking paper, and heavily scented.

"It's from mother," said Nora.

She turned away and left him to read it.

Wharton skimmed the first few lines disinterestedly. The letter was written from a hotel at Newport, and was full of description of the people staying there, and the wonderful diamonds which Granville Elder had given to his bride.

We really are perfectly happy, dear Nora. It is so delightful to have one's own suite of rooms, and everything in the world money can buy. Granville is most devoted, and I really feel as if I am getting back my lost youth.

Wharton's lips curled a little contemptuously. He thought of Granville Elder, fat and vulgar, and a little shiver swept through him.

And now, dear, I have a little confession to make to you. You may not remember it, but some weeks ago you wrote a letter to George Wharton, and gave it to one of the servants to post. Well, dear child, entirely in your interests, I did not allow that letter to be sent. I know how headstrong and impulsive you are, and believing the poor, dear man to be a murderer, I wished to shield you, and so the letter was never sent.

Of course now, in the light of what has since transpired, and that wretched man's confession, the case is *entirely* altered, and you most certainly might do worse than marry a man of Wharton's means and position. It would give me great pleasure to know you were safely and happily married.

There was another rambling page, and then a gushing ending:

Ever your devoted mother.

Wharton folded the letter and looked across at Nora. She was standing with an arm resting on the mantel, staring down the long room with wistful eyes.

He moved across to her and silently gave her the letter again.

"Thank you," he said.

She turned and looked at him.

"So of course you never had the letter," she said tremulously. "I beg your pardon for ever having doubted your word."

There was a little silence. The silver clock chimed half-past nine mournfully.

Nora looked up at the man.

"Oh," she appealed brokenly, "don't you want to know what I wrote to you about?"

"Tell me."

She bent her head till it rested on her arm. When she spoke he could hardly hear what she said.

"I asked you to marry me. I asked you to make me your wife then, and not to wait till—till we lost our happiness."

Wharton lifted the slim hand that hung against the soft folds of her frock, and kissed it gently. But he would not give in one iota. She had wounded his pride sorely in the days that were gone. The mastery in him longed to break her pride to his will. The seconds raced away like little agitated heartbeats.

Then suddenly she began to sob, pitiful, low sobs that broke the silence of the room painfully.

"Nora!"

He was beside her in a moment. He put his arms around her, raising her head, and bending it gently backward till it rested on his shoulder.

"Nora. Do you still love me?"

She turned to him, lifting her arms till they met round his neck.

"Oh," she said, sobbing, "I thought I should have died when you never came, when you never wrote to me."

"You will be marrying a comparatively poor man," he said unsteadily. "All the money—Guy's money—will go to his son. It ought never to have been mine. The little chap must have it, Nora."

"I want him to. All along I hoped you would give it to him. I could not bear that we should have it." She looked up at him with swimming eyes. "Don't you think you might kiss me now?"

It was barely daylight when George was wakened from the first good night's rest he had known for weeks, by Sonnie's shrill voice at his bedside and Sonnie's little hand tugging his arm.

"Wake up! Wake up!" he insisted.

George yawned, and rubbed his eyes.

Sonnie clambered onto the bed. He made a pretty picture with his flushed cheeks and tumbled hair. In his arms he clasped a shaggy teddy bear which Lucy had presented to him the night before.

"Get up!" he insisted. "It's day!"

George laughed. He felt very young and happy. It was a delightful feeling to wake to a day which held something more than dragging hours and misery.

"Sonnie," he said, "I'm going to be married."

"Oh." Sonnie was not interested. "What's that?" he asked.

George hesitated.

"Well," he explained doubtfully, "it's when you go to church with some one you love very much, and the parson says you're married."

Sonnie frowned.

"Who do you love very much?" he demanded.

"You call her the pretty lady," said George softly.

"Oh, but she can't come with us to London."

"Yes, she can."

"Oh." Sonnie considered the matter. "Do you *want* her to come?" he asked dubiously.

"More than anything in the world."

"Oh." Sonnie heaved a sigh of resignation. "I s'pose she must, then," he said.

He put the teddy bear on the pillow and tucked him in snugly with the quilt.

"Shall you have to pay for her?" he asked presently.

George laughed.

"Why yes, I hope so."

"Lucy says it'll be very 'spensive."

"So it will."

Sonnie sucked his thumb.

"A dollar?" he asked.

"More than that."

"Oh! Will it be a hundred dollars?"

"Very likely."

"Lucy says you must be very rich." The brown eyes, so like Guy Stanton's, were solemn, awe-stricken.

George thought of the arms that had circled his neck last night and the soft lips that had kissed him, and he answered gravely as he looked at the other man's child:

"I believe I am, Sonnie. I believe I'm the richest man in the world!"

The End

ANOTHER serial by Miss Ayres will start soon. In the next issue, dated February 17th, is a novelette by her, entitled:

"His Secret—and Hers"

Poison-proof

By Alice Grant Rosman

ELINOR TREVES wondered if there was any poison known to science which could take effect on such a man as Athelstan Gleere. He was so absolutely poisonous himself that he was probably poison-proof. The very atmosphere he created reeked and stupified the poor fools who came to him as clients, bemused and blinded them so that they paid all they had for the poison he dispensed.

Athelstan Gleere had grown rich and fat, two things in his youth he had greatly desired, and when he met Elinor Treves he became ambitious. Somewhere in the suburbs there was a Mrs. Gleere, of course, but she counted little. Nothing counted much with Gleere but money, and, since the last three weeks, Elinor.

She had beaten him right from the very first. Never before had he taken on a secretary so lightly. Whatever her capabilities, Gleere had known that he wanted Elinor in his office. Just a few casual questions, and then "thirty dollars a week" he had said.

"Forty," she had answered firmly, and shrugging his shoulders, Gleere had agreed. After all, he had thought, a skillful employer can always get his money's worth from those under him.

Business was intolerably bad. To a man who runs a money-lending agency and a bucket shop combined, this is a serious thing.

Nevertheless, Gleere came to the office even more regularly than when his waiting room had never lacked a shivering man on the brink of bankruptcy. More odious even than the smile of Judas he wore for his clients, was the clumsy leer he donned for Elinor; worse still the blundering efforts he made to break the barrier, colder than steel, that she raised between them. Elinor, too, in her own way, was poison-proof.

A ring or two is not of much consequence in a man's eyes; but sooner or later Gleere was bound to notice. Just as she was going home, as she was placing with his unnecessary help the cover of her typewriter, he saw the band of gold about her finger.

"You came to me as Miss Treves," he said, "yet you wear a wedding ring?"

"In business Miss Treves sounds best, I think," she answered. "But if you wish to know, my real name is Mrs.——"

"Not at all," he broke in hurriedly. "A girl who has a secret in her keeping has an added fascination. And, besides, I would prefer to know you as Miss Treves."

"Why?" she asked, too busy putting on her hat to think of his meaning.

He did not speak, but, turning, she read the answer very clearly in his expressive smile. Without a word, her cheeks burning, she passed from the room, downstairs and into the street.

It was a pity, but she would have to give him notice in the morning. The salary was good, and she wanted it. The money her husband had arranged with his firm to pay her before he left on a business trip to the East, had proved insufficient to cover the weekly bills for herself, her little kiddie and the mother who lived with her. Gleere's forty dollars made all the difference. With it they could have all those little luxuries to which they had been accustomed.

Before her husband sailed she had begged him to sell the shares left her by her father, so that she could have some money to draw upon if she needed it in his absence. But he had told her that it would be unnecessary and unwise, and that she would be able to get along easily with the allowance his firm was making her. She had pressed him but he had persisted, rather strangely, she thought, in his objections; and now the result proved her plan the wisest. Graham had been detained in the East, and she had been forced to go out to work herself again.

But she had not mentioned this fact in her letters to him. He would not like it, and he had worry enough. When he came home she could explain.

She waited eagerly the next morning for Athelstan Gleere to come. The anticipation of giving him notice was exciting her. More than probably he would give her the opportunity to tell him the precise breed of cad she knew him to be.

Weak men in their misery and anger had hurled their abuse at Gleere without hurt to him, but Elinor knew that she could twist the steel so that it would leave a scar forever. As she sorted his letters for the last time she marshaled in her mind the phrases that would sting and stab.

Suddenly her mind ceased from its brave adventuring. In the pile of envelopes she had reached one that stood out from all the others like a living thing. It was a familiar envelope; it bore the postmark of Penang. Many such a letter had come to her in her home, many such a letter addressed by the hand which had addressed this letter to Athelstan Gleere.

A cold fear gripped Elinor's heart. What had her husband to do with Athelstan Gleere, professional breaker of men? Never had Graham spoken of him, never a whisper that he knew him either in business or private life.

Private life! It was scarcely likely—Graham and Gleere! The letter was on business, then, and Elinor knew only too certainly the probable nature of it. His victims groaned while Gleere, the money lender, grinned, watching them writhe in the entanglements he had spread for them.

At any cost she determined to find out the exact meaning of the letter. Afterward she could invent some excuse, however weak, for opening it. Her fingers bent the corner; another moment and it would have been torn across.

But the door opened and her employer stood before her. In his hand he carried a rich bouquet of flowers.

"Good morning, Miss Treves," he said. "Beauty deserves a beauteous bower, what?"

Now was the time for Elinor to open the way for that little speech on which she had spent so much thought. Gleere's clumsy compliment had given her the excuse for which she had hoped. To tell him she was going, to tell him why, to tell him what he was—here was the moment ready for her. Yet never a word came from her tongue. That letter from Penang, now lying downward on

her desk, had dumbed and stifled her. Till she knew what it contained she must bear patiently with Gleere.

He did not seem to want to work that morning. He flung back the top of his desk and tossed the letters into it. A few of them he opened and laid carelessly aside. Elinor's eyes were ever on his hands, watching when they should pick up the letter from Penang. But the envelope was shuffled in the pile, and his fingers never reached it.

The man of business had a mood for pleasure. Those who wrote to Athelstan Gleere could wait for an answer; he never lost anything by letting them wait for an answer. Why should he trouble with them when there was an attractive girl in his office?

Only work which they could do together did he want that day. From old files he wanted letters so that he could join in the search; a new system of indexing he devised so that he could sit by her and explain the method in needless detail. And all through it, for the sake of that letter on his desk, she gave no sign of the fierce hate she had for him.

Gleere went out to lunch in a bad temper—and alone. Elinor smiled bitterly as he closed the door none too quietly behind him. In spite of his inattention to business he had not forgotton his cautious habits; by closing his desk he had imprisoned Graham's still unopened letter.

It was nearly three o'clock when he returned, and Elinor's heart beat violently as she saw him at once begin to read the correspondence he had neglected in the morning. Half a dozen letters he opened and scanned, some with a muttered curse and some with a sneer, ere he picked up the fateful letter.

The girl trembled as she watched him slowly take the thin paper from its envelope. She pretended to write a letter on the machine before her, but struck the keys at random.

Then she knew that what she had most feared was true, for Gleere laughed twice in that short, ugly way he had when a man was down.

Elinor stopped typing. "Why do you laugh?" she asked, looking him full in the face across the machine.

"Eh? Laugh? Oh, these fools make me laugh. This chap, for instance, crawls to me, so many months ago, and touches me for a couple of thousand. Says he's buying a house on a rotten installment system. It was to be a surprise present or something, for his wife."

"For his wife?" interposed Elinor softly.

"Oh, yes, there is always a woman when I get a client! Well, if he wasn't able to raise two thousand he stood to lose all he had put on the house before. So I gave him the two thousand, on terms, and he gave me securities."

"What securities? Why didn't he realize on them himself?"

Her burning fingers, clutching the letter, went cold. There stood her employer!

"Well, they were really his wife's, but they were negotiable enough. But if he had sold them he would probably have had to explain to his wife, and then the secret of the surprise would have been blown. Silly sentiments cost money. Anyhow, I'm selling the bundle to-morrow."

Elinor gasped. It was *her* money Graham had pledged! And Gleere talked of selling. Why, the shares were worth well over ten thousand dollars, and the bill was a mere two thousand.

"You're selling! How can you be selling?"

"Easy. The debt falls due to-morrow, and by our arrangement if it's not settled I'm entitled to take the full security. That's plain enough, as he knows, for this letter is from him entreating me to postpone the action. Says he's in the East, unable to attend to business, and that sort of child's chatter. Not my fault if a man goes off and doesn't bother his head about the money he owes!"

"Are you going to sell?" asked Elinor.

"You bet! D'you think I come here all the year round to help idiot husbands buy secret houses for their wives? There's over ten thousand clear profit on this deal; not a bad little job these hard times! With an expensive secretary, flowers and all, you know, I've got to make a bit now and again."

It was with expressive relief that a little later Elinor saw him prepare to go. The presence of the man in the room frightened and repelled her. Athelstan Gleere was going to ruin her and her husband as he had ruined hundreds before them.

When at last he left her she buried her face in her hands and longed to cry. Her heart ached and her temples throbbed, but she could not spare time for the solace of tears. To save Graham and herself she must work, hard and desperately.

There seemed only one possible way to beat Gleere: to regain the securities Graham had deposited, dispose of them for their full value and pay off the bill before it lapsed on the morrow. Heavens! how Gleere would storm if she cheated him so!

There was danger in the plan, big danger, of course. While her deeds were with Gleere they were his property, and tampering with another man's property is no light matter. But if she was successful, and paid the debt before he discovered that the securities had gone, he could rave forever but never hurt her.

The key of the safe was in Gleere's roll-top desk. It would be a simple enough matter to get hold of that. But to open the great safe, even when she had the key, might be beyond her powers; for what secret combination of letters it was that released the lock she did not know, beyond that it commenced with the letters "FL". One day when Gleere was opening it she had heard him mutter those letters; to the remaining ones she had no clew.

She set about her task full of hope; there could not be, she imagined, many words beginning with "FL"—twenty or thirty, perhaps, if as many. Athelstan Gleere kept no dictionary in his office, or she might have seen the great mass of words from which she had to choose.

"Flare," she tried first. With a smile she admitted her defeat. Again she started, this time tuning the keys till "flame" was completed. Again it was no use. A third attempt, "flight," brought no luck.

It was harder than she thought, and slower. If she could only have kept the first two letters always standing it would have been some help, but once a word was completed the next one had to be started from the very beginning. The monotony and the strain began telling upon her nerves.

She was halfway through the next shot, "flower," when the telephone

started with its loud, insistent call. For a second or so she was so frightened that she dared not move. For the first time the full realization of the fact that she was doing criminal work swept over her. That harsh call from the world outside flooded her mind with visions of witnesses, and the thing that men call the law.

Then, as the bell rang sharply again, her strength returned, and she placed the receiver to her ear.

A man's voice demanded Gleere. "Not in? . . . Where has he gone? . . . Home? No, I've already phoned there. . . . Vertiger's on the wire. Most important to see Mr. Gleere at once! If he comes back will you have him ring up Mr. Vertiger at once? . . . All right. Most important, remember!"

If Gleere came back! He'd have something more exciting on hand then than the ringing up of Vertiger! But Gleere was gone for the day, Elinor knew, and once more she turned to her task.

Word after word she tried, hope dying on the last letter. Her hands ached and her heart sank. "Flush," "flurry," "flood"—all were useless. It was on "flint" that Vertiger rang up again.

Gleere hadn't returned? The man couldn't suppress the note of concern, of anxiety, in his voice. Elinor asked, wondering at her calmness now, if she could take any message. Vertiger's were almost rude in the shortness of their answer.

She had nearly exhausted her stock of words that began with the letters required; she had to think hard each time for a word. "Flippant" was a long and wasted effort; "flagrant" was as bad. What other words were there? Words of three and four letters, she knew, were not worth the trying.

She was beaten, then? Her courage, her determination, almost failed her. Little by little her strength ebbed as disappointment followed disappointment and failure piled on failure. Gleere, then, would win. Gleere would laugh. Graham and she would be broken, lose all their dreams.

Surely there was another word; just one more chance! In truth there were many, but they would not mirror themselves in Elinor's mind. Book after book she picked up, searching, but no help came from the printed pages.

Hope had almost vanished when an inspiration came to her. If Gleere had a spark of humor in him the word she had in mind would be the right one. But what humor had she ever seen in Gleere? Absurd to try, and yet—it was all their happiness against one more effort, just a little more strain.

Bending, she unlocked "f" and "l." Those she could have done blindfolded by now. Then came "e," and "e" again. Two more turns of the key, and she would know if her last chance was in vain. "C" she turned, and then, scarcely daring, "e" for the third time. "Fleece"—and the safe lay open before her!

Fleece! So, flickering somewhere in Gleere's twisted mind, there was a touch of humor, gaunt and grim. Elinor, for a little space gave herself over to light, hysterical laughter.

She stooped forward to take from the pile of papers those which she was seeking. She found them, recognized them, pressed them to her breast. For once in his life Gleere had been bested—by a woman, by a woman he would fain have bested! What news to send to Penang!

In that moment of her triumph a voice behind her made her swing round, terrified and shaking, to meet the sneering face of Athelstan Gleere.

"A pretty business!" he said slowly. "A very pretty business!"

Elinor swayed, and gripped for support the cold steel of the safe. She wondered that her senses did not leave her, but some subconscious strength told her she would not faint. All faculty of

"A pretty business!" Elinor, terrified, swung around to meet the sneering face of Athelstan Gleere.

speech or thought or understanding was destroyed within her.

"Squeamish people say these little things can be settled without the police," he went on. "I don't agree with them. People who abuse confidential positions by committing criminal offenses must pay the penalty. I must, I regret, ring for the police."

He moved across the room toward the phone. Elinor raised a limp hand in a gesture to stay him, but relentlessly he went on and took the receiver in his hand without raising it.

"No, no!" she managed to gasp. "Not that! Anything but that! I have done nothing!"

"You have achieved nothing, you mean. What you have done is evident. My desk is broken into; my safe is open, and its contents abstracted. Even now you are holding papers of value in your hands. The facts will be simple enough in the eyes of the police."

Elinor's staring eyes were fixed on the hand that still kept the receiver pressed upon its rest. If that hand was raised, disgrace would be hers, her husband's and her child's forever. If only she could think!

"Some other way!" she murmured. "For mercy's sake some other way!"

Gleere looked at her with eyes that were small and hard and cruel. What fools women were, he thought. How easy to bluff and beat! Just his word against hers, no corroboration, a little circumstantial evidence—what could the police do? You had only to frighten a woman a bit, and you could do what you liked with her.

"There is no other way," he said. "And yet it seems a pity. I am lonely myself to-night; that's why I chanced to drift back to the office. So perhaps I can understand how lonely you would be with the police. Suppose we take compassion on each other—a little dinner, a little gayety afterward, a theater perhaps? We may possibly forget this little lapse, Miss Treves?"

Elinor was steady enough.

"Ring for the police," she said. "Ring."

The man admired her more than ever as she stood at bay, proud and plucky to the last. The fighting kind put up a struggle, but it was the kind best worth breaking. And he felt quite sure that, with all her bravado, Elinor would fail at the last.

"As you please," he said, and was about to lift the receiver when the heavy silence of the room was broken by the clamor of the bell. Gleere placed the receiver to his ear and answered, the girl banished momentarily from his mind.

"Yes, Gleere speaking. . . . Oh, Vertiger? All right. . . . Yes, Gleere himself. Go on. . . "

Like a flash Elinor saw her opportunity. She was across the room and outside it, and the key was turned in the lock, before Vertiger had begun to speak with Gleere. She was safe and free, and with her freedom returned the old desire to conquer.

The telephone ran from Gleere's office through to the outer office where now she was. Gleere's phone, in fact, was only a connection from the one here, specially arranged so that no calls could go through to him unless he so desired. By removing the plug Elinor could have cut off Vertiger, or by leaving it in and listening at the receiver she could hear all that was passing.

She wondered if Gleere would tell Vertiger anything about her. If he did, by listening, she could cut him off before any harm was done. And—happy thought!—when Vertiger had finished she could make it quite impossible for Gleere to ring up the police.

She placed the receiver to her ear. Vertiger's voice alone came through the wire; rapidly and distinctly it sketched ruin for Gleere if he did not act promptly on the advice Vertiger was giving. "Your whole holding," Elinor heard, "won't be worth five hundred dollars unless you unload before noon to-morrow. By three o'clock Bambalasas will be down and out."

She could hear Gleere's protestations and Vertiger's reiteration of the case. He had news in secret which by to-morrow at midday would be public property. It was absolute certainty. To-morrow the shares in the great mine would not be worth the price of confetti.

"I'll sell first thing in the morning," said Gleere, and Elinor heard the click which separated the speakers. The next instant she was at the locked door.

She heard him swear as he pulled at the door and found it fast. Then he called her name.

"I'm here," she cried. "What do you want?"

"You've taken some papers of mine!"

"They're in my hand now. I'm the wife of the man who wrote to you from Penang to-day. Do you understand?"

"Precisely. But do *you* understand? Do you realize that you are committing a robbery, that so many months in prison——"

Elinor laughed freely now. A little while ago that threat had made her shiver.

"Oh, no," she answered, "no robbery, Mr. Gleere. I'll leave the securities on this table here. I am through with them. But to-morrow I am a bear in Bambalasas. Brazenby's will work for me—I am a cousin of Victor Brazenby, you know, and—well, you'll lose a trifle in the selling, Mr. Gleere. I think you know that business is business!"

If she acted as she said, Gleere would lose many thousands of dollars.

"Open the door!" he said. "You can keep your papers!"

"That won't quite do," she answered. "First sign a receipt for my husband's bill and pass it under the door."

In a minute the paper came pushing through. Elinor examined it, and with a happy smile slipped it into her blouse.

"That's all right," she called. "There's nothing for the police now, is there? Good night, Mr. Gleere. My salary for this week you can keep, for you won't be seeing me again."

"Let me out!" cried Gleere savagely. "Let me out!"

"I don't think it would be healthy for me," answered Elinor. "But I'll tell the caretaker to come up in ten minutes. Good night!"

She sped home quickly and happily. Reaching her cozy sitting room at last, she was amazed to see sprawling in the big armchair a familiar figure.

"Graham!"

The next moment she was in his arms. He was trying to explain why he had come. Dimly she heard something about catching a boat at the last moment, and business downtown.

"Oh, you mean Athelstan Gleere," she said carelessly, as she disengaged herself. "You needn't trouble about going to see him. What a dear old idiot you have been!"

In the next issue, dated February 17th, is a breath-taking story by Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith, entitled:

"Caves of Moaning"

AN OLD LOVE LETTER

WRAPPED in its stately, formal phrases bide
True tendernesses, and each yellow page
Conceals the magic charm that knows no age.
But in the days when Prudence laid aside
Her 'broidery, a blushing cheek to hide
Behind its gallantry, hearts were not dressed
In simple guise, and sighing swains confessed
Their love in words that poets' arts defied.

And when one cons once more this ancient screed
That great-great-grandmamma so quaintly kept
In fragments of her bridal gown, its creed
Seems like a wakened wonder that has slept
For countless years, all unsuspected there,
Like some stiff bloom that hides a fragrance rare.

CHARLOTTE BECKER.

Myrtle

by May Wynne

Author of "His Hidden Enemy," etc.

"YOU must never get too old," said Jem, "to tell me secrets."

Myrtle looked at him. It was so silly of Jem to talk as if he were an old fogey of a guardian just because her parents had left her to Aunt Ann.

Aunt Ann was a delicious mother-substitute, but Jem as paterfamilias was ridiculous.

"You ought to tell me your secrets, too," she declared resentfully. Unconsciously she held the doctrine of equal sex rights.

Jem smiled. It annoyed Myrtle not to be able to understand that smile. She felt she was quite old enough to understand a lot of things.

"Suppose I do not possess any to interest you, little pal?" he replied.

"I'll see," said Myrtle, "First of all you can tell me if you have ever been in love?" She looked at Jem as she said this, with her head slightly poised to one side, her blue eyes questioning.

Jem did not realize that those blue eyes held secrets, too. The color had crept up under his skin.

"Yes," he said, "I have been in love."

Myrtle's heart beat rapidly. She plucked a daisy and pulled at its petals.

"A long time ago?" she asked.

"Yes," said Jem, "a long time ago."

"Oh," said Myrtle, jumping up, "I do wish you wouldn't talk as if you were a hundred! I shall give you a shaking one of these days. And—and I shan't be bridesmaid at your wedding!"

Then she ran away.

Jem picked up the daisy. There was one white petal left sticking to its yellow heart.

"A little," murmured Jem as he pulled it off. Then he sighed.

Myrtle went violet hunting that afternoon. It is dull doing anything alone, and yet she would not have told Jem where she was going. She wanted to think.

Jem had not told her the name of the girl he loved. But she could find out for herself, now that she knew. Was it Maud Leyton, the vicar's daughter? No, she was too young. Or Celia Croft? Surely she was too old! Sybil Worth? Certainly not; she had often heard him say he did not like her.

What about Lavender Creel? Ah, yes, what about Lavender Creel?

"She's an old maid," murmured the girl. "She must be thirty. And Jem is only thirty-two. Yet—it might be Lavender. She is beautiful. Aunt Ann says she is good. She says she respects her. I wonder why it sounds like being Methuselah, to be respected? Lavender is not Methuselah, but she doesn't seem like a girl. I suppose it is being mistress of a house and having servants to look after. But why didn't she marry Jem long ago? Is she going to marry Jem?"

The violets remained unpicked while Myrtle strove to solve the problem. But she only succeeded in learning why her heart ached.

"I'm never going to tell Jem secrets again, never," she thought drearily. Her step had lost its elasticity as she walked home.

And Fate must have been busy, for at the gate she met Lavender Creel.

Myrtle had been quite right in calling this woman of thirty beautiful. But there was more than beauty on the fair face. Any one who understood would have been able to tell you that Lavender Creel had known sorrow.

She greeted Myrtle sweetly.

"I am so glad I met you, dear," she said. "Will you tell your Cousin Jem I have had the letter, and—and I should like to speak to him about it?"

Myrtle's pulses thumped hideously. Oh, she had been quite right, quite right, for a beautiful color had risen in Lavender's cheeks, and a new look crept into her gray eyes, a look which held secrets and wonder, and some sweet, unnamed mystery. But Myrtle was wise in understanding mysteries now. She guessed what that look meant. It only surprised her that she had not been wise before.

"I will tell him," she said. "Oh yes, I will tell him. Good night."

Lavender Creel looked into the pretty, childish face and knew that Myrtle was a woman; but she did not ask herself why she had become one so quickly.

Myrtle did not go to look for Jem. It was he who found her, curled up in the big chair in the old library.

"What have you been doing with yourself, baby?" he asked softly.

Myrtle gave a little shiver.

"I think I've caught grippe," she explained. "I shall go to bed. And Lavender Creel has got the letter, and she wants you."

The old library was shadow filled, for the day was dying. Yet Myrtle saw Jem's face grow bright and eager as though he had heard good news long delayed.

"At last!" said he. "At last! Thank you for bringing good news, little messenger."

His big, sunburned hand caressed her curls with familiar touch, but Myrtle jerked her head away.

"Lavender Creel is quite an old maid, isn't she?" she remarked—and was furious with herself for having said it! Jem did not answer, but Myrtle heard the quick, half-repressed sigh as he turned away.

"I'm a little beast," she thought miserably. "And I do hate feeling like a beast!"

But she had grown hard as granite before next morning. And the reason was that Jem came back from Lavender's home looking as happy as a boy.

"He might just as well say he is engaged to her," thought Myrtle, "because it is perfectly obvious that he is, or is going to be."

The thought made her somehow flippant, somehow tragic, somehow spiteful. In fact her moods might have been gathered into a bunch and rolled into one.

Jem had gone to town by an early train.

"Gone to get the engagement ring," thought Myrtle. "I wonder if that old thing will wear white. But of course she will, and carry a sheaf of lilies and turn up her eyes to the skies as if she were eighteen!"

Myrtle was not feeling like sweet eighteen herself. And her head really was aching as she lounged round Aunt Ann's sitting room. On the mantelpiece was a photograph of Jem in his early twenties. What a darling boy he looked! Myrtle linked her hands behind her back. Aunt Ann was sewing charity petticoats. Myrtle loved those petticoats; it seemed so pre-historic even to *think* of a red flannel petticoat!

"Was Jem in love with Lavender Creel when that picture was taken?" she asked suddenly.

Aunt Ann dropped her scissors.

"My dear child," she exclaimed, "who has been talking to you about Lavender?"

Myrtle laughed. It is much easier to play act with your back to some one, isn't it?

"Jem told me himself," she replied carelessly.

Aunt Ann picked up her scissors.

"I am surprised Jem should have done so," she said. "It is not quite like him. But I would rather not talk of it, my dear. All I can say is how thankful I am that Lavender is to be made happy after all."

Myrtle yawned. "I don't think it is worth while being alive after one is thirty," she remarked.

But she did not wait for a reply. And that afternoon she went to see Philippa.

Now I am sorry to record that Philippa was not a nice friend for a young girl like Myrtle. Nominally, Philippa was twenty-two, but virtually she was sixty. In other words she was a woman of the world who at seventeen had sold herself to the god of gold. As the wife of a famous near-millionaire she certainly had all that money could buy—and nothing it could not! The result was a cynical busybody who wanted to thrust herself onto the front platform of society. She was staying in the village for two weeks and she told Myrtle she was bored stiff after two days.

She welcomed the girl with open arms. The child was something of an heiress and would admirably suit the Poet. Philippa had taken up the Poet not wisely but too well, and now wanted to drop him into the first pair of arms outstretched to receive him. She decided promptly to arrange a match between Myrtle and the Poet as soon as the girl hinted that she was bored with the rôle of country mouse.

Philippa smiled. "I thought you were looking out for a life sentence with the Big Bear," she said mischievously.

Myrtle flamed. How could Philippa possibly have guessed she even *liked* Jem?

"The last man in the world I should want!" she swore. It is shockingly easy after having told half a lie to tell a whole one.

Philippa stretched out her hand.

"Come and find the Poet," she urged. "He is writing a sonnet in the woods. He will call you Flora, or Arethusa, or something equally romantic, and the wedding will be nothing but classic garb and nightingales' tongues."

Myrtle was speechless. Philippa had the same effect on her sensibilities as an electric battery. But there are times when we enjoy being shocked.

So Myrtle shook hands with the Poet, who asked himself to tea and called her Diana. Myrtle nearly laughed, but he was so good looking that he could not be altogether comic.

Jem was home from town about tea time and found Myrtle telling the Poet's fortune by tea leaves. Jem didn't seem to like the Poet. Myrtle contrasted the two men, but I shan't tell you what she made of the contrast. Anyway she told Jem afterward that she thought the Poet wonderful. It was an honor to know him.

Jem only laughed.

"I hate poetry," said he. "The only thing that ever stuck in my memory was 'Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle.' Anyway I wish your friend Launcelot Algernon Edwin would cut his hair."

Myrtle shrugged her shoulders; she knew that irritated Jem enormously. She also remarked that she and the Poet were going to gather violets next day.

"He loves flowers," she explained. "They talk to him. I'm sure, Jem, the other poet must have known *you* when he said:

> "A primrose by the river's brim
> A yellow primrose was to him,
> And it was nothing more.

"It's typical," she finished.

"What of?" asked Jem. He seemed perplexed by Myrtle's mood.

"Blind eyes," she told him, and then most furiously blushed.

Next day Myrtle strolled through the wood with the Poet and found a great deal more than violets. If I say she both flirted and hated flirtation you won't believe me. But it is true.

Jem stayed at home and wrote letters, but he also went to see Lavender. Lavender was out, for the simple reason that she had set out to see him. They met in the shaded avenue. Myrtle was walking alone in the wilderness of daffodils adjoining, and saw the meeting. She stooped low. Her face was very white.

"Oh, my dear!" she heard Lavender cry. "Oh, my dear! What can I say to you? All my life will be too short to tell you what I feel. Jem, I am the happiest woman in the world!"

The unhappiest was creeping away through the tangle of shrubs.

And that evening Myrtle had far too bad a headache to come down to supper, while next day she welcomed the Poet with open arms.

Jem did not go to the city that morning, nor did he write letters. Quite possibly he looked for Myrtle, but he did not find her. By the end of the week he had repeated the experiment often with equal failure. And failure appeared to depress him. By Saturday morning he looked positively ill. On Sunday he might have been described as "hang dog." And the greatest puzzle of all was that he had not announced his engagement.

"I hope the Poet will propose first," thought Myrtle. "Oh, I do hope he will!"

But the Poet had not yet had a chance to inquire into the exact details of Myrtle's inheritance. So he delayed.

And on Saturday afternoon Fate stepped to the fore again.

Myrtle was awaiting her Poet when a big, handsome man carrying a brown bag came down the lane. Such a lane! The stranger hesitated at sight of the slim young thing in blue who seemed to be presiding over budding hedgerows.

"Can you direct me to Miss Lavender Creel's house?" he asked. He said the name with a sort of reverence which matched the secrets in his eyes.

Myrtle pointed.

"That white bungalow over there," said she, "And there is Lavender Creel herself."

But the stranger had hardly waited for the last words. He went forward at great strides, and the trees standing there at the road edge hid him as he reached the gates.

But Myrtle heard his cry. "Lavender!" Heard the answering "Roy! Roy!" then fled as if she had trespassed unpardonably.

But she did not wait for the Poet. She went right home to find Jem smoking furiously as he strode to and fro along the orchard boundary. He halted at sight of her, and his eyes held pain.

"Child," he said, "I can't stand it! I've got to do my duty. And that chap who calls himself a poet isn't fit to be your lover. He's—well, I don't know how I can say it, but I've got to save you somehow from lifelong misery. Won't you listen? Won't you tell me? Little pal, can't you trust me?"

She clasped her hands. Her eyes searched his face, demanding even before she spoke.

"If I tell my secret will you tell yours?" she asked. "Are you going to marry Lavender Creel, whom you have loved for years? Or is she going to marry a man called Roy?"

Jem did not quite understand at first; then the light broke. Myrtle could not read the expression in his eyes.

"I have not the right to answer those questions," he said slowly, "but Lavender will do it. For my sake she will do

it, because she is the truest woman in the world. Will you listen, little pal, if she comes to tell her story?"

Myrtle grew hard again.

"I shall have to listen if she comes," she said, "but—I shall go on hating her."

She would have liked Jem to argue. She would have liked the torture to continue, but she was disappointed.

"I shall go and ask Lavender to come," said he.

Myrtle sat alone in the old library. She did not intend to talk to Lavender in the drawing-room. She did not intend to talk much at all. She meant to be terribly dignified and distant. She intended to be as nearly rude as she dared.

Aunt Ann could apologize afterward; and if she didn't care to, what matter?

"To-morrow," she whispered fiercely, "I am going to make Launcelot propose! That will be my answer to Jem. He has no right to try to learn my secrets!"

The door opened and Lavender Creel came in.

Myrtle had the distinct impression that she ought to rub her eyes to make sure she saw straight. For no one could have called Lavender an old maid today. She came across to Myrtle, but she did not try to kiss her. She did not even shake hands.

"Dear," she said very gently, "it is sweet of you to listen to the story a woman ten years your senior has to tell. I am going to begin now, and you need not speak till all the tale is told."

She seated herself beside Myrtle but her face was raised, looking toward the window against which yellow sprays of jasmine flung themselves.

"Twelve years ago," she said, "I met Roy Allen. I knew he was a widower. His age was twenty-five. We fell in love. I think I was so obsessed with the glamour of my wonder dream that I did not notice Jem was claiming more than I could ever have given. He was only twenty; I was eighteen. He—Jem—asked me to marry him the very day after Roy had proposed; Jem did not know of my engagement. I was terribly grieved. But Jem played the man. He realized he had to fight down his passion. Meanwhile Roy asked for a short engagement. The week before our marriage the wife he had believed to be dead turned up. She was—impossible.

"Thank Heaven there was no tragedy! I feared terribly; Jem saw my fear and no knight of romance ever acted more gallantly. He forgot himself entirely. He served me with devotion and saved Roy from eternal regret. The woman went abroad and Roy went to Canada. Jem went with him, and would not let him sink. Oh, Myrtle, think of it! Five of his best years without hope of reward! Then Roy got a good position up there and Jem came home.

"But even that was not enough. Tirelessly he searched for a clew to the woman Loretta whom Roy had paid off. She only wanted money. A month ago she died. Jem had kept in touch with Roy and wired him. Yesterday the only man I ever loved came home. I know he has never loved a woman but me. Yet our happiness would not have been complete had I not known a year ago that Jem had learned to love another woman, a child woman, true and sweet. He loves her with the love of his manhood, made the finer and better for the stainless romance of his boyhood. Ah, Myrtle, it would break my heart if I thought I had really robbed such a friend of his happiness. Won't you go to him and give him his reward?"

Suddenly she leaned forward and kissed the younger girl. Myrtle burst into tears, but her arms were about Lavender's neck.

"You ought never to have had to tell it," she sobbed. "But I love you, I love you for doing it!"

Lavender Creel smiled.

"Jem is in the garden," she said. "He is waiting to tell you his secret."

Myrtle laughed through her tears.

"I am going to tell him mine first," she replied. "I am going to tell mine first."

Later—oh, much later—the two happiest people in the world met the Poet. He stared at them with lack-luster eyes.

Jem grinned and made his announcement. Myrtle blushed. She felt guilty, but there was no need.

Launcelot Algernon opened his mouth to reproach a perfidious maid, but Jem interrupted.

"Your friend misinformed you," he said urbanely. "My fiancée's fortune is under a thousand a year. Good day."

"Insolent upstart!" thundered the Poet. But he retired.

Jem drew Myrtle close. He felt she needed consolation.

"Darling!" he whispered.

And there we will leave them.

MY CHOICE

OH, the highroad's a nigh road that runs across the hill;
But give me the winding byroad that leads me to the mill.
It roams through fragrant orchards where rosy petals fall,
And over rushing brooklets where the water fairies call.

Oh, the highroad's a white road where lords and ladies ride;
But the byroad's a green road where lovers true may bide.
There birds are warbling softly, telling secrets to the breeze,
And nests are safely hidden in the overarching trees.

Oh, the highroad's a mad road where wealth and folly pass;
But the byroad's a glad road where waits my lovely lass.
For pleasures of the highroad I'd scorn to pay the price—
Oh, the field path's a byroad that leads to paradise!

RAY H. GROSS.

In The Face of Death

by Elizabeth Miller

IT was night in Mashonaland. A faint breeze swept the lonely veldt, cooling the grass after the heat of the sun. On the stoop of a bungalow, alone with the fireflies, a man lounged, smoking. He was an Englishman; he had bought the mine only a few weeks ago, and now there were whispers afloat of trouble brewing among the natives—not a pleasant prospect for an investor in landed property. Not that Jack Midway was inclined to look upon the black side of things; but his chum had ridden into camp after mail and provisions that afternoon, and he was lonely.

"And there goes my last pipe," he said regretfully, "and there's no more tobacco. I trust Jimmy won't dawdle among the attractions of town. Guess I'll turn in."

At the same moment there came a thud of hoofs, and a strange apparition appeared: a girl on a horse—a girl, of all unlikely things at that place and hour! Was he dreaming or was she flesh and blood? She reined up, and sprang down before he could regain his presence of mind.

"Mr. Midway," she said in a quick, clear voice, "I've come to warn you. The country is up!"

"You have come to warn me?" gasped Jack, dazed.

She leaned panting against the iron pillar of the stoop, with the bridle over her arm, and he saw now that she was pale and that her great dark eyes were like stars.

"There was no one else," she explained simply. "I'm Stephen Trevon's daughter. Father's sick and he's gone into camp with some neighbors of ours. We saw your friend ride west to-day. And we're neighbors and compatriots, you know."

"You, a woman, have done this for me!" he cried. "You, a girl, have ridden twenty miles through a hostile country at night to save the life of a man you have never seen! Oh, God!"

The word was a sob. He caught her hand and would have raised it to his lips, but refrained, and only pressed it as he would have pressed a man's who had done him a like turn.

"We must leave this place at once," he said. "I'll saddle my horse. There isn't a moment to lose!"

"*I* can't go," replied the girl hopelessly. "My mare's lame. She climbed in a hole just now."

"My horse shall carry two."

"What chance should we have like that? You go."

"And leave you behind alone?" He laughed at her. "While I live we stand side by side, so help me God! My chum's in camp. He'll bring the boys to help us. Now to barricade the house!"

He was a strong fellow. He worked like a combination of man and horse, hauling furniture about, bolting and barring wherever there was bolt and bar. And the girl helped him with her quick wit and strong young arm. But it was little, after all, that they could do. The bungalow was built more for coolness than defense.

"Can you fire a pistol?" he asked her.

"Yes," she said.

"Then there's the pistol for you and the gun for me. If we can't hold out long, we'll account for a few of the devils before we say good-by. I should keep the last shot if I were you."

She showed her comprehension of his meaning with a nod.

They sat very quiet after that, waiting, afraid to talk lest they might miss the warning sound. The clock crept round too slowly, so slowly that every half hour seemed a year.

Sometimes the man looked at the girl and wondered at the quietness of her eyes, the sweetness of her lips, the curve of her lithe young figure, the cream and damask of her skin. And sometimes she looked at him and her even breathing quickened and the color rose, to fade again upon her cheek.

"Hush," he whispered. "What was that!"

His voice, broken and husky, cut the intense silence like a knife.

"Shake hands," he said. "Good-by."

And then—when death is near, the souls of men and women disdain small habits and conventions—he drew her close to him unresisting, and kissed her once upon the cheek.

They were coming. The sounds grew nearer. A shrill halloo mingled with the gallop of horses' hoofs. Then the man, kneeling down to watch for death, saw life, and sprang to his feet, his eyes aflame.

"Saved! Saved!" he shouted. "It's Jim and the boys! They've reached us first!"

Back to the world they rode together, safely guarded. And because of what had passed between them the girl's lids were drooped shyly and her voice was low. But at the parting of their ways he took her hand again in his.

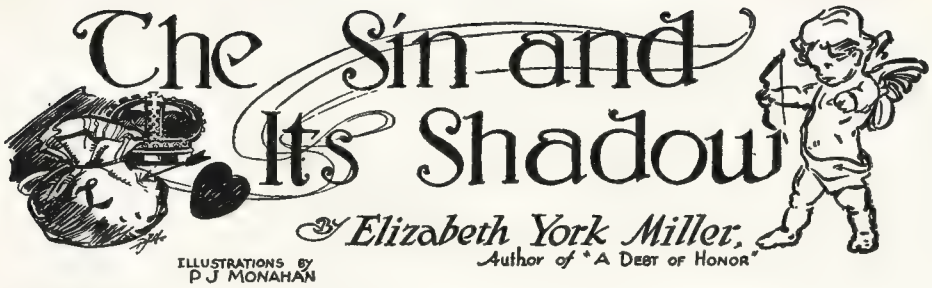
"I shall see you to-morrow," he said. "We've faced death together, comrade. We know each other. There's no need for words between you and me."

WORLDS

MY glad world is the laughter
In your shining eyes of blue,
And the rapture I am finding
When I kiss the lips of you.

My sad world is the sorrow
In your heart of misery,
And the passion of your weeping
Is all agony to me.

EDGAR DANIEL KRAMER.



SYNOPSIS.

Many years ago Lord Moorhill, then Norris Gideon, a young Australian prospector, persuaded his girl wife, Jenny, to divorce him. He was tired of her, and in love with a more sophisticated woman, who is now Lady Moorhill. As the story opens, Moorhill's wife appeals to him in distress because her son—she was a widow when he met her—Alan is having an "affair" with Lila Roche, a French revue actress. An old partner of Moorhill's, Bill Soames, comes to London and tells him that Jenny is dead. But he goes to see "the Roche woman" and recognizes in her his first wife.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was some little time before Lord Moorhill made a recovery, by no means complete. Curious that he himself had always felt that some day he would see Jenny again! But in his wildest dreams he had never expected to find her like this. At twenty-three, when he left her, she had been an old woman; at—was it thirty-seven or thirty-eight?—she was unbelievably young. Fifteen years ago Marta had been radiantly youthful and Jenny a crushed, faded creature.

What of himself? Had he changed so noticeably? And in what way?

He experienced a sickening sense of helplessness. Jenny, this situation—how could he deal with either of them? The shock had completely unnerved him. He had come to offer a check to the French play actress who had ensnared Marta's son, and he found Jenny Gideon, his one-time wife. But she had told him that *she* was the play actress. Lila Roche, "the most notorious woman in Paris," the woman who drove a tandem in the Bois and dressed up her groom in white to match her horses, and who did all sorts of other spectacular things, was Jenny Gideon.

None of it fitted in with the Jenny of old Moorhill days. This wonderful woman had emerged from a very dark chrysalis. But stop a moment! It was only in Sydney that Jenny had been drab. Prosperity had not agreed with her.

Lila Roche was French enough as far as her clothes went, and French to Moorhill in a music-hall sense, spelled utter frivolity. But the woman did not look frivolous. The solemnity of Jenny Gideon dwelt in her pansy-brown eyes; her lips curved tenderly, just as Jenny's had been wont to do when she bent over to kiss the child in her arms. After the baby was born her lips somehow had got fixed in that tender, wondering curve, and it had held all down the years.

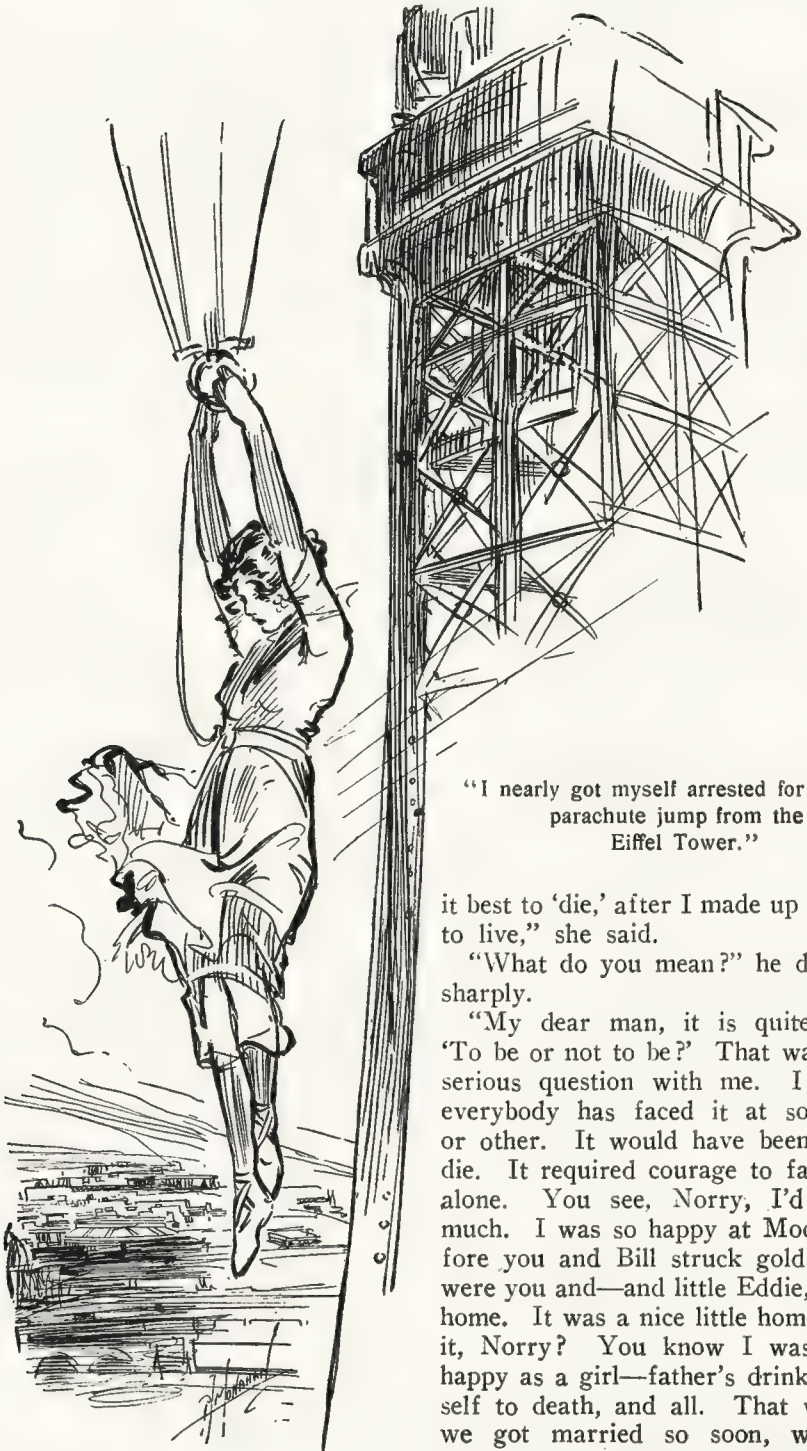
"Soames told me you were dead," Moorhill said, articulating with difficulty. His throat still felt too big for his collar, and he believed that he had had a mild "stroke" of some description.

"Oh, have you seen Bill?"

Jenny seated herself and picked up her fancy work. She had an air of great detachment.

"Yes, I've seen him," Moorhill replied briefly.

Jenny threaded a needle. "I thought



"I nearly got myself arrested for doing a parachute jump from the Eiffel Tower."

it best to 'die,' after I made up my mind to live," she said.

"What do you mean?" he demanded sharply.

"My dear man, it is quite simple. 'To be or not to be?' That was a very serious question with me. I suppose everybody has faced it at some time or other. It would have been easy to die. It required courage to face life—alone. You see, Norry, I'd had so much. I was so happy at Moorhill before you and Bill struck gold. There were you and—and little Eddie, and our home. It was a nice little home, wasn't it, Norry? You know I wasn't very happy as a girl—father's drinking himself to death, and all. That was why we got married so soon, wasn't it, Norry? We thought we couldn't afford

it, and everybody said I was too young. But, oh, I was happy! And you were happy, too. It was wonderful. Then to lose it all!. One by one all that I treasured, slipped away from me. First, we said good-by to Moorhill and our little home; then Eddie died; then you —stopped caring for me. Is it strange that I didn't find life very attractive?"

She rested the embroidery frame in her lap, and it seemed to Moorhill that her soft brown eyes were searching down the long way she had traveled to discover, if possible, what had led her to this crossroads.

"Jenny, I—I don't know what to say. You make me feel a brute. Yet at the time——"

"Yes, I know. I was so stupid after Eddie died. I think I realized what was coming, but I couldn't fight a woman like Mrs. Staines. She was so beautiful, so brilliant. I was ignorant. She had Alan, and I had lost Eddie. You see, the heart hadn't been taken out of her."

"Alan!" Moorhill exclaimed. "You can't possibly be mad enough to think of marrying that boy. That's why I'm here—to prevent it. My God, it's a joke, if you like!" He laughed grimly. "But go on. Tell me what you did. You thought of killing yourself—go on, tell me. You changed your mind about that, eh? Yes, you changed your mind. You decided that you'd go on living. You had fifty thousand pounds. That would help you to a decision, wouldn't it?"

He checked himself sharply. What on earth was he saying?

"I beg your pardon," he said with an abrupt change of tone.

Jenny did not look offended. She regarded him gently.

"Yes, the money did help," she said. "You were very generous, Norry. I traveled all over the world, and I studied. At first it was just to keep my mind off other things, but after a while I began to understand what knowledge really meant. In fifteen years one can collect quite a respectable education. Do you remember Mary Foley?"

Moorhill nodded. This was the second time in one day that Mary Foley had been recalled to him.

"When I planned what I was going to do, I got Mary to write to Bill Soames and tell him I was dead. Dear Bill had me on his mind. If he thought I was underground I knew he wouldn't worry any more. A year or so afterward Mary Foley joined me, and we've always kept together more or less. She has a big dressmaking business in Paris now. I studied singing under De Reszke, and then a clever little Frenchman by the name of Paquette thought he saw something in me beyond the voice, which isn't any too wonderful. I could put up some money—thanks to you, Norry—and so I was launched on the music halls. It was a mere speculation"—she shrugged her shoulders lightly—"but a successful one. Paquette also had money in it. I didn't want to risk his losing, so we thought up various advertising stunts. I've done all sorts of weird things. It's rather amusing, Norry. Last week I did a parachute jump from the Eiffel Tower and nearly got myself arrested in consequence."

If Moorhill had not been so utterly miserable he would have tried to express his disgust.

This woman who had once been Jenny Gideon, had disorganized his quick powers of judgment and decision. He was trapped by the fact that she had been his wife. Reconciliation of ideas was impossible.

"You've had the outline of my history, Norry." She smiled at him. "And yours is familiar to me, thanks to our informative press. What is it you want? To stop my marrying Alan Staines?"

CHAPTER VIII.

Moorhill got up and went to one of the windows, which was open. The summer twilight lingered, and a faint breeze blew in. He felt need of its refreshment. He, who had been so vigorous all his life, was rather alarmed to discover how little reserve of strength he possessed. He had stuck too closely to that office of his. This was, indeed, a warning.

"Are you in love with that boy?" he demanded contemptuously.

"Boy? There isn't much difference between the case of Alan and me, and that of you and your second wife," Jenny said. "Of course I am older than Alan. But so is Lady Moorhill a great deal older than you, Norry, and I trust your marriage has turned out happily. At least it is a social success."

Moorhill's lips tightened and the veins in his neck throbbed uncomfortably.

"I am not here to discuss myself," he said.

"Very well, discuss me then. Do you think I'm not good enough to marry Lady Moorhill's son?"

"Jenny, the thing is impossible! It's monstrous. You ought to see that."

"But why? I've lived a perfectly decent life, Norry—thanks again to you. My money has been a great protection. And now, I'm getting just a little lonely. The stage was fun, but I took it up only to occupy my time and my mind. I'm tired of it. Henri Paquette has got his money back and a little fortune besides. I've added considerably to my own capital. I put up the money for Mary's business, which has flourished amazingly, and of course I draw my share of that. If you came here with the idea of buying me off, Norry, you might as well know at once that it isn't to be done. I am not to be tempted."

"If I should tell Alan who you really are," Moorhill mused.

"By all means, do so."

She rose as though wishing to terminate the interview.

Moorhill looked at her intently, and a curious spasm of mingled longing and regret seized him. This woman from whom he had strayed, whom he had done his best to forget—how was it possible that the sight of her could so stir him? Because she was beautiful?

He thought of her as he had seen her last, in the lawyer's office in Sydney: plain, unlovely, clad in black, sitting stiffly upright on the edge of a chair. And he had been glad to get rid of her, intensely relieved that she had made no scene.

"Marta doesn't know that I was ever married before," he said. Then a disagreeable thought entered his mind. "Does Alan already know who you are?"

The woman laughed gently.

"I told you that, as far as I am concerned, Jenny Gideon is dead. Alan doesn't know anything about her. He thinks I am a widow."

"Then you—you *are* in love with him?"

"Not in love as I once understood it, Norry. All that's behind me. But Alan is a nice boy—you called him a boy, didn't you?—and thank God he thinks of other things besides money."

"You're right in that," Moorhill said scornfully. "He has scarcely got a sou to bless his name with, and at the present moment unless I come to his rescue he's in for a warm time with his bank. I suppose you mean to support him. If I were a woman I couldn't have much respect for a man who let me do that."

She made a vaguely careless gesture.

"That doesn't matter. I never knew anything that mattered less to me."

"He will get tired of you. You're not a young woman, Jenny, although I must admit you've held your own very well. But in a few years' time——"

"Are you tired of Marta?"

"I told you that I'm not here to discuss myself!"

"Well, I think we've discussed me long enough," said Jenny coolly.

She reached out as though to ring for her maid, but Moorhill stopped her.

"Wait a moment. There's a girl who's very fond of Alan. Until recently——"

"You mean Miss Lancing?"

"Yes."

"He told me about her. He's very anxious that we should meet. He told me that they were good pals, nothing more. You take this very seriously, Norry. Are you so fond of Alan yourself? Do you think he'll be ruined if he marries me? Times have changed since we were young, Norry, and I have tried to move with them. After all, who is Alan Staines that the people should object to his marrying Lila Roche? His own mother was a fortune-hunting widow trading on her titled connections, when she singled you out for her second husband. She wouldn't have married you if you had been poor. I'm sure even you realize that. Alan is in love with me. His love is just as disinterested as yours was for his mother——"

"Stop! I can't stand this!" Moorhill cried.

His voice was hoarse and somehow he found himself holding both her wrists, compelling her gaze, seeking to draw her closer. But she held herself firmly aloof. There was a steellike quality in her resistance.

"Jenny, it would kill me if you married that boy. I simply can't endure the thought of it. I'd go mad. Promise you won't—say you won't! I'll do anything—I'll give you anything, if only you'll promise!"

She twisted herself free of him.

"There's nothing you can give me," she said. "Don't you understand? It isn't in your power to give me a single thing I want."

"Jenny, it will kill me if you marry that boy!"

He scarcely noticed how pale she was; even her lips were pale.

"Jenny——"

"Yes?"

"I—oh, forgive me, forgive me! It was so long ago. I must have been mad. How could I have done it! You shouldn't have let me."

The woman reached out a trembling hand and steadied herself against a chair.

"You would have hated me if I had kept you when you wanted to be free," she said. "You would have hated me all your life."

CHAPTER IX.

Moorhill would have given a great deal not to be obliged to return to Park Lane that evening. For one thing, he did not feel in the least well. He was not fit for the ordeal of a cross-examination from his wife, and the very thought of Alan gave an intolerable jar to his already shaken nerves. Then, of course, there was Soames. He dreaded Bill Soames even more than he

"Did it ever strike you that you and Norry killed Jenny Gideon's soul?"

did his family. Bill had got hold of the wrong end of the stick where that divorce was concerned, believing that he, Moorhill, and not Jenny, was the injured party.

But however much he disliked the idea of going home, it had to be done. He took a taxi back and this time the footman got the door open before he could find his key. It was always a race between them, but to-night Moorhill had lost interest in the contest. Hobson relieved him of his hat and stick and at that moment a very unusual spectacle presented itself—no less than Alan Staines in a state of unrepressed rage.

Alan came tearing along the hall jamming on his hat, his face, angry.

"Oh, there you are!" he cried before Hobson was quite beyond earshot. "So you've come back, have you? I'd like a word with you. It's lucky we met here instead of somewhere else."

Here was insolence unveiled. Moorhill could not have been more surprised if his stepson had struck him in the face. But instantly he realized the cause of the young man's fury. Alan's mother, stupid woman, had been at him again, and had given away the fact that Miss Lila Roche was being called upon with bribery in view.

Moorhill tried to keep cool. If both of them lost their tempers there was no saying what might happen. Yet he, too, was enraged. Impudent puppy! Aspiring to marry Jenny, Jenny of all people!

"Well, what is it? What's the matter with you?"

He turned toward his study, Alan following.

"You said you were going to your club," the young man sneered.

"Am I obliged to account strictly to you for my movements?" his stepfather inquired.

The big flat-topped desk was between them. Alan's hands were twitching. Like all men who habitually keep a guard upon themselves, now that the barriers were down he flung himself broadcast upon the wings of rage.

Moorhill bit off the end of a cigar and lighted it.

"Well? Well?" he demanded.

"You went to Lila, to offer her money," Alan accused him.

"Which I am sorry to say she refused. Or, rather, she gave me no chance to offer it," Moorhill replied.

"Of course she didn't. Only a man like you could have imagined that she would. Only a low cad——"

"Here, my lad, aren't you forgetting yourself?"

"Thank God I've still got it in me to forget myself! For two pins I'd punch your head."

Moorhill pitched his freshly lighted cigar into the fireplace.

"For less than that perhaps it's my duty to give you a good hiding," he said.

At all costs he must cling to the parental pose. If he lost that he was lost himself. It would become an ordinary broil between two men over a woman. Had Lila Roche been merely Lila Roche, and not Jenny Gideon, Moorhill could have handled this situation with skill and dignity. He would have swallowed Alan's insults, or brushed them aside as of no consequence. Perhaps, even, he would have apologized. But as it was the personal element intruded. He was not a man given to the feeble vice of self-analysis; otherwise he would have realized the truth. He didn't want Alan to marry Lila Roche because she was Jenny. The thought of Jenny dead, had saddened him, but it was bearable; the thought of her alive, victorious in the battle of life and married to Alan Staines, was intolerable.

"I shan't take a hiding," Alan said. "At the same time, I mustn't forget that you're not a young man, and you're out of condition. I advise you not to try the hiding."

And then something curious happened to Moorhill. It began with a sharp stab somewhere in the region of his heart and trickled down with numbing effect. He took a step forward, stumbled heavily, and brought up half sprawling against the desk.

It was humiliating to be helped to a chair by Alan and dosed with brandy. He was conscious all through, and his rage was as futile as that of an infant. The hands of Jenny's lover touching him! The indignity had to be borne.

A strange, throbbing sound filled his ears: his own heavy breathing. He gazed around, wide-eyed and helpless. There were a lot of people in the room who had appeared with startling suddenness. There was Marta, golden-haired and painted, in full evening regalia including a small fortune in jewels; there was old Bill Soames, black-coated as for a funeral; there was Hobson and Emma Hartford. The latter administered smelling salts and sal volatile to him.

The spasm passed and Moorhill became something faintly resembling himself again.

"I hope no one has been fool enough to send for the doctor," he said. "There's nothing the matter with me. A bit tired—busy day at the office. That's all."

His voice trailed off. He was lifted and carried upstairs to bed. Somebody had "been fool enough to send for the doctor," and that somebody was Alan.

CHAPTER X.

To Lady Moorhill fell the task of dining alone with old Bill Soames that evening. Alan refused to remain. He was too deeply hurt by what had happened, and had but one thought in mind, to get back at once to the woman he loved. Moorhill, by order of the doctor, remained in bed with nothing but his thoughts for company.

So Lady Moorhill and Bill dined together.

They made a curious picture, Marta and Bill Soames, facing each other across the dinner table. The butler and two footmen attended to their wants. Champagne was poured into Bill's glass. Every time he emptied it—and he couldn't seem to help doing that—the butler promptly refilled it. He was too much overawed to protest. He had thought the meals on the boat were wonderful, but this dinner, just an or-

dinary dinner in old Norry's house, beat the boat's most ambitious efforts.

Everything fairly smelled of money. Bill argued to himself that even the flowers must be well-nigh priceless, merely because they had been chosen to decorate this table. The gold dessert service reminded him poignantly of Moorhill. Perhaps the metal had come from that very mine.

His hostess chatted most amiably. He never dreamed that she was not at all pleased with the idea of his having presented himself for such a lengthy visit. She did her best to put him at ease, and by the time the dessert had arrived he was in such a mellow state of being that he had forgotten his original prejudice against her. When the butler and his henchmen marched out and left them alone together, Bill Soames completely regained himself. The champagne had vanished, also, but a decanter of port stood at his elbow.

He helped himself to the port and a couple of bananas.

Marta peeled a peach with nice deliberation.

"Mr. Soames," she said thoughtfully, "I am going to ask you something."

Bill smiled, inquiring and attentive.

"Of course you knew my husband intimately years ago, didn't you?"

"Like my own blood brother," Bill replied. "Norry and me—blood brothers, as you might say, although I'm some considerable older. Norry was just a lad when we chummed up together."

"Then you must have known his wife, his first wife."

"Eh?" Bill started. Hadn't Norry told him that Lady Moorhill knew nothing about Jenny?

"His wife," Marta repeated. "Her name, I believe, was 'Jenny.'"

Bill half stripped a banana and proceeded to eat it in a common-sense fashion.

"Of course, Norry never mentions her," Marta went on. "I dare say he thinks I don't know. Men are such children. I knew he was married when I first met him."

Bill swallowed a portion of banana insufficiently masticated, and he could feel it all the way down, a distressing lump progressing with painful slowness.

"As to that," he said with a final gulp, "when did you first meet Norry?"

"In Sydney. That is to say, on a yacht in Sydney Harbor." She gave Bill a brilliant description of the occasion, and went on: "He thrilled me, Mr. Soames. I knew then that Norris Gideon was destined to become one of the biggest men in England, and I told him so. He was simply wasting himself in Sydney."

A cold sensation settled upon Bill Soames. Never had he seen things more clearly than he did at that moment. He even knew that he was drunk. He pushed back his glass of port untasted. Fortunately there was no butler present to suggest his drinking its contents.

"You knew Norry was married when you told him what a fine fellow he ought to be?"

"My dear Mr. Soames, what his being married had to do with that I confess I don't know."

"It was on your account, then, that Jenny divorced him?"

Marta flushed under her rouge.

"Really! That you could suggest such a thing!"

"I'm asking, not suggesting. But of course it was. He made her divorce him, and then he hops over here by the first steamer and marries you. That's about the size of it."

"I know nothing as to that," Marta said coldly. "What I wanted to ask you was this: do you ever see Mrs. Gideon?"

"Jenny?"

"Yes, Norry's first wife."

"She died. Fourteen years ago, now, it would be," Bill replied.

"Oh, no, no! You're mistaken. She was alive three months ago."

"That she couldn't be," Bill said firmly.

"I know she was. A friend of mine, an Australian woman, now Lady Harbutt, told me she ran into Jenny Gideon at Monte Carlo this spring. It wasn't merely that she recognized Mrs. Gideon, but they actually had a little chat together. My son was at Monte Carlo at the same time. He was staying with the Harbutts for a week or so. Then he went on a walking tour—all by himself, I believe. Lady Harbutt said it was very curious about Mrs. Gideon. She got the impression that she was concealing something, that very probably she was living a double life. She looked quite smart and youthful, according to my friend, surprisingly so. Another woman was with her. Let me think—oh, yes, a Miss Foley. They were going on a walking tour, also. Lady Harbutt told me that this Foley woman used to be a dressmaker in Sydney, but now she was established in Paris."

Bill Soames had no more appetite or thirst. His one idea was to get out of this dishonored house as speedily as he had got into it. Perhaps Jenny wasn't dead. The introduction of Mary Foley's name provided good circumstantial evidence to the contrary. So much the worse for everybody!

Bill had swallowed the lump of banana less painfully than he could the fact, so patent to him now, that Jenny had been got rid of to make way for another woman.

"Did it ever strike you, ma'am," he said suavely, "that you and Norry between you must have damn' well killed Jenny Gideon's soul?"

Lady Moorhill laughed. Profanity did not shock her.

"I decline to be held responsible for anything so serious. Forgive me, Mr. Soames, but I'm afraid you're taking advantage of your old friendship with my husband."

Bill got up. He had no manners.

"I'll say good-by now. I'm right-down sorry I came. Tell his lordship this house ain't good enough for me. 'Tisn't likely I'll ever see him again."

He took long strides to get out of the dining room, otherwise he might have come to grief. His head was clear but in other ways he was none too steady.

Ten minutes later Hobson speeded him, together with his bulging valise and cotton umbrella, from the Park Lane mansion which was not good enough for old Bill Soames.

Having been a little too clever, Marta Moorhill was minded to fall back upon her convenient reputation for stupidity.

She heard a groan from her husband's bedroom.

Of course Norry would want an explanation of Bill Soames' departure. He would probably accuse her of some breach of hospitality. She could be spiteful and nagging in a small-tongued way, but under it all she was afraid of her husband. She knew that he was tired of her, that, indeed, he had begun to neglect her long before her beauty faded. But the neglect had nothing to do with other women. His career was her only rival, and she was not jealous of that as some women would have been.

What reason could she give for Soames' dramatic exit? Perhaps inspiration would come to her aid.

She went first to her room and discarded her jewels and the heavy, cloth-of-gold dress which weighed her down mentally as well as physically.

"I must see how his lordship is," she told Emma Hartford. "Then I think I'll go to bed."

Emma slipped her into a dressing gown of gray padded silk. She crept down the long corridor. How silent it was; how empty the house always seemed to be! Just Norry and she in this great gilded shell!

Perhaps it was haunted. Could a house in Park Lane be haunted? No, that was a human groan from a man tossing miserably in his sleep.

Marta opened the door softly. If Norry was really asleep she would not waken him. She hoped to find him slumbering soundly.

A night light was burning on a partially screened stand, but the bed was in shadows. Great, long, sinister-looking shadows they were, that sprawled and quivered grotesquely.

Upon his wife's entrance Moorhill started up.

"Jenny!" he cried. "Jenny, is it you? Forgive me—only say you forgive me. I won't ask more than that. Forgive me, Jenny, my own, my very dearest!"

CHAPTER XI.

Alan Staines cooled down somewhat on his way to the Carlton. Ordinarily he was a level-headed young man with a strong sense of justice. Had Moorhill been his own father he would still have been angry, but certainly would not have offered to punch his head. And no father could have been more patient and generous in the past. There had never been anything slightly approaching a rupture before.

It was true that Alan realized that a certain amount of good-natured contempt was mixed with his stepparent's indulgent attitude. Alan had been given a desk at the office and a good salary, but no particular duties. He was of less account than Cummins and not nearly so useful as the office boy. For a year his main occupation had been to choose haberdashery for Moorhill, who admitted the young man's superior taste in such matters, and to supervise the office and house supplies of stationery. He also attended to the family invitations and was frequently in demand at house parties as a substitute for Moorhill. It was the lighter, the social side of the big man's life, which Alan represented.

When he broke away from the office and from home as well, establishing himself in a Chelsea studio, Moorhill raised no objections, but pretended not to know what had happened.

Alan's one real talent had always been systematically ignored. It was not admitted even by his mother that he had it in him to paint worth-while pictures. He had struggled against the chains of wealth as heroically as many another painter has struggled against poverty. Money was always in his pocket, and a thousand distractions clamored in his ear. He was laughed at if he said he was busy and could not do this, that, or the other. Moorhill wanted him to stand for parliament, and his mother upheld the notion. It was considered

desirable that he should marry Anne Lancing, the daughter of a family rich in political tradition.

So much pressure being brought to bear on him, there had been many hours of despair for the young man. Moorhill had the gift of blotting out the personalities of those with whom he was in constant contact. One might say that for the people he could not use he had no use.

Alan had frequently discussed his ambitions with Anne Lancing, and up to a certain point he found her sympathetic. She was a slim, boyish young creature with a thick mop of bobbed hair and a very modern view of life. She lived with an elderly relative who was supposed to chaperon her, and she "had gone in for" interior decorating. It was she who had chosen Alan's studio for him and furnished it extravagantly, having always in mind that Lord Moorhill was behind the bills.

But with the studio achieved, there was still a great deal that Alan Staines lacked. He found it ultimately in the person of Lila Roche.

They had met at a famous artist's house in February. In April, together with a friend of Lila's, a Miss Foley, they had tramped the byways of the Côte d'Azur, stopping as night found them in some remote mountain village, lingering as they chose, and all three of them working hard. The actress studied her new part in a forthcoming revue; the dressmaker planned her autumn fashion compaign, and the painter painted.

Alan had never realized before what sheer ecstasy this world can hold. He was fairly drunk with happiness. It was one half the woman and one half work. He loved them both, and one evening in the little hotel in Tenda, from where the train was to take them homeward, he asked Lila Roche to marry him. It seemed to him that through her his dreams might all come true.

There had been, perforce, a simplicity in this vagabond life which brought out the true natures of the wanderers. It revealed Lila Roche as vitally feminine in the highest sense of the word. It revealed indescribable pathos in her life, although not the source of it.

Perhaps she had seen the proposal of marriage coming and had prepared for it. That he was Moorhill's stepson, she knew. She accepted him, and at evening they climbed a snowy slope to see the glorious sunset on Tenda, and one of them was preposterously happy.

Miss Foley, when told of the engagement, raised her eyebrows and congratulated them. Privately she said to her friend, "I suppose this is revenge."

Lila Roche had shaken her head.

"Not altogether, Mary. I'm lonely, and Alan is the most adorable companion I've ever had. There will always be a wistful ache in my heart when I think of this wonderful month."

"H'm," sniffed Mary Foley, "that's all very well. But I can tell you, I shall be glad to see Paris again. I'm getting positively moldy!"

So they had gone home, Alan temporarily back to his desk in the city of London, Mary Foley to her adored business, and Lila Roche to her spectacular stage life.

But, heartily tired of her career, she took advantage of a loophole in her new contract and canceled it. The cost in money was trifling compared with the relief of abandoning the stage. Alan and she were to be married immediately and live in his studio, the one to paint pictures and the other to darn socks. In between times they would wander about as they had in the hinterland of the Riviera, foot loose and fancy-free. Even their honeymoon was to be a sketching picnic: first to Paris to close up Lila's charming house in the Champs Elysées and select a few things she wished to keep, then down the coast of

Brittany for the whole of the summer. It was from Brittany that Alan had planned to inform the family of his marriage, but unfortunately Anne Lancing in whom he confided, had betrayed him.

Money, the need of it, had quite escaped his calculations. It had always been provided and he had accepted it with scarcely more thought than a baby takes its bottle.

To-night, however, he realized that finance might have some bearing on his future. He was something like fifty pounds in pocket and a thousand out at the bank. He had quarreled seriously with his stepfather, and his mother said he was breaking her heart.

Money would certainly be required, and he understood the justice of Moorhill's attitude if not its violence. To-morrow he must see that injudicious bank manager himself and arrange some form of settlement. His estate from his own father brought in about five hundred a year. He could, as he had intimated, sell out some shares, or he could hand over sufficient security to the bank to enable the loan to stand. Through the kind offices of Anne Lancing he had already sold two small pictures. Who could say what the next year might not bring forth?

CHAPTER XII.

He went straight up to Lila Roche's suite without having himself announced, and it was very disappointing to discover that she had gone out. But Miss Foley, who had come over for the wedding, was there. "Perhaps," the maid said, "m'sieu' would like to see Miss Foley?"

Alan said he would be glad to see Miss Foley.

She came in, still in her traveling clothes, an austere little creature severely smart in a tailor-made costume and plain hat under which it was said, in a complimentary sense, there dwelt a man's brain. She wore a gardenia in her buttonhole and from a black cord there hung a valuable gold lorgnette of the Louis Quatorze period.

Alan admired Miss Foley and was a little afraid of her. She was one of those fearfully competent women whom every man secretly dreads. Lila, though competent in her own way, did not have the same paralyzing effect on the opposite sex.

"Hello," Mary said, offering a vigorous handshake. "Well, here I am. Lila's gone out. Didn't Félicie tell you?"

"Yes. She thought you might know where."

"I don't. I saw her only for a moment. She was putting on her street things and seemed in a hurry. I haven't had my dinner. Have you?"

"Not yet," Alan replied. "As a matter of fact, I'm in no particular rush. Are you dining up here?"

Miss Foley replied that she was; she had ordered a light meal for herself, and would be glad if he cared to join her. He was on the point of accepting when she mentioned the fact that "Lila" had said she might be late in getting back—as late as ten or eleven, possibly.

Alan still had packing to do for to-morrow's journey.

"Oh, well," he said, "I'll look in later. If Lila returns sooner than she said, ask her to ring me up."

He wondered where she could have gone. The jealousy of a lover lurked behind the question. It seemed a little odd not to have told Miss Foley. It couldn't be to a theater or she would have said so. Indeed, he couldn't conceive of Lila's racing off to a theater by herself, particularly when Miss Foley had just arrived.

He made his way Chelseaward, a little out of patience with things, and a light in Anne Lancing's front window

reminded him that he also had a grievance against her. Her little house stood on the corner of the narrow street which terminated in the block of studios where he lived.

He mounted the shallow flight of steps and rang her doorbell. She answered it.

"Oh, Alan, how charming of you! Cousin Belle has gone to the Queen's Hall and I'm all alone. Do come in."

"It's not in the least charming of me," Alan said stiffly. "I've just looked in to tell you that you're an interfering young busybody."

Anne's smile faded but the dimples which accompanied it remained. She swept a hand across her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Alan. I truly am. I had no intention of splitting. But there's something almost hypnotic about your mother and I'm such a bad liar, Alan. You see, she'd got wind of it from another quarter first, and then she questioned me. Oh, don't think I'm putting the whole blame on Lady Moorhill. The fault is mine."

The girl's lips quivered and the poignant blue of her eyes, gazing so steadfastly into his, gave him a sensation of uneasiness.

"It's all right, Anne. I don't want to quarrel with you. Only, there's been the dickens of a row. It's funny, but I had an idea that the pater wouldn't raise serious objections. He's always so absolutely indifferent as to what I do. I expected trouble from mother, but I can't understand him——"

Anne led him into her little blue and primrose-yellow sitting room. They had quite naturally resumed their relations of friendship. He found that he couldn't be angry with Anne; moreover, he didn't want to be. He visioned a future in which, with Lila, they should form a harmonious trio.

"It's kind of you to forgive me," the girl said wistfully.

He looked at her more closely.

"Anne, I believe you've been crying. Anything gone wrong?"

"Things are always going wrong in this rotten world," she replied. "Don't you find it so?"

"Sometimes. What especially to-day, Anne?"

"That's the worst of it. There's nothing special. Well, I suppose I shan't see you again for ages, Alan. It seems so queer that you're going to be married."

"It won't be ages," he said. "We're coming home in September."

"I shan't be here then."

"Not be here?" He was vastly astonished.

Anne squared her slim young shoulders. Not for nothing had she driven a motor ambulance in France. She was brave and could look facts in the face.

"Cecily Martin has invited me to go to Canada with her and Ben. It's Empire propaganda stuff, you know. Ben is going to film the forests and waterfalls and things, and we're to hold meetings and make speeches. It's all frightfully interesting."

"Sounds so. Still, I hate to think of your giving up your work here. You're doing so jolly well, too. So you've entirely abandoned the idea we once talked about—of combining our talents? Decorative work fascinates me. I'm not so sure it isn't my real *métier,* and it certainly is yours."

Anne made little knots in the corners of her handkerchief.

"Life is too short to do all the things one has dreamed of," she said. "But who knows? We'll both come back some day, I suppose. Only, it won't be quite the same. I don't believe your wife will like me, Alan."

He lit a cigarette.

"What utter nonsense!"

"I'm sure I won't like her."

He laughed a little angrily. "Of course if you're going to talk like that! How unfair of you, Anne—just like

She found herself in the presence of her former husband's wife.

mother and Moorhill! I wouldn't have believed it of you."

Her lips quivered into a tremulous smile. "Don't be too hard on us, Alan. You see, we've got so used to having you around that we resent a perfectly strange woman stepping in and usurping our privileges. It's a crude and primitive form of jealousy."

"Flattery can go too far," Alan said with mock gallantry. "You do me too much honor, Miss Lancing. But when you ascribe jealousy to the pater—jealousy of *me!*—you are stretching a long bow. Well, I must jog off now. I've left everything to the last moment, as usual, and there's no Hobson to pack for me, nor a Hartford to see that my socks are in order."

She went to the door with him. It was a warm, misty night. Little red and green and yellow lights dotted the river here and there; a tug hooted; the treetops sighed gently; Chelsea, with her myriad memories, rested quiescent.

"Good night, Anne."

"Good-by, dear Alan, I hope you'll be tremendously happy."

"Thanks, old girl. Good night."

He strode off briskly up the narrow little street.

Anne went back into the house, the knotted handkerchief pressed against her lips.

CHAPTER XIII.

Lady Moorhill stood in her husband's dimly lighted bedroom.

He had called out not to her, but to Jenny, his first wife. Never before had he given the slightest sign of his first wife's existence.

A chill enveloped Marta. For years she had been expecting, not this exactly, but some form of self-betrayal from Norry. As a husband he had been a great disappointment to her. His career had absorbed him, and she had long since discovered that he had married her chiefly because the alliance would further that career. But about one thing she had never needed to worry: Moorhill was not a man who ran after other women.

A sharp hatred of this Jenny thrust itself like a knife into her heart.

Norry, as he lay tossing and muttering in his sleep, looked absurdly youthful. A lock of hair straggled over his forehead, and she bent down and smoothed it back. The touch awakened him and he started up again, this time fully conscious.

"Oh, it's you," he said, blinking at her.

"Who did you think it was?" she asked bitterly.

"I don't know. I was dreaming. What is it, Marta?"

"Nothing very special. I just looked in to see how you are."

"That's very kind. Won't you stay?"

She seated herself on the edge of the bed.

"Norry, Mr. Soames has gone. Don't think I was rude to him, for I wasn't. It was the other way about."

"Gone? Bill? You mean he's left the house?"

"Yes, Norry. I think he drank too much wine at dinner. Anyway, he suddenly accused me of something most peculiar. He said that you were already married when you first met me, and that you got your wife to divorce you so you could marry me. He said that your first wife's name was Jenny. I felt I must ask you about it."

Nothing could quite equal Marta's clever manipulation of the truth.

Moorhill braced himself with a pillow.

"Yes, it's true," he said.

So Bill Soames had betrayed him. Could he altogether blame Bill?

"True!" Marta gasped faintly, as though taken by surprise.

"There, my dear, what does it matter? It was a long time ago." He was completely weary and wished she would leave him to what small measure of peace he could find.

"Apparently it doesn't matter to you, but it's a dreadful shock to me," she sniffed, fumbling for her handkerchief. "Mr. Soames said this house wasn't good enough for him. He said that to *me,* at my own dinner table."

"I can't help what he said. Look here, Marta, Thursfield gave me a sleeping draft——"

"You want me to go?"

"We can talk this over in the morning. I've had a tiresome day."

"Oh, very well. The next time you dream, don't do it out loud."

With that puzzling bit of advice she left him.

Her world, never altogether satisfactory, had turned upside down today. She trailed along the corridor toward her own rooms, convinced of the utter emptiness of everything.

Hobson approached her. "Oh, my lady, there's a lady called to see his lordship—important business, she said. I told her that his lordship had retired but she said I was to take up her name to him; that very likely his lordship would be quite annoyed with me if I didn't."

"What is her name?" Lady Moorhill asked suspiciously.

"Miss Roche, my lady."

Marta half expected it. Women were not in the habit of calling upon her husband in his own home, and there had leaped instantly into her mind the conviction that this visitor was Alan's betrothed. Perhaps Miss Roche was not satisfied with the terms Norry had offered. She might reasonably have had a second thought in the matter.

"Where is Miss Roche?" she asked.

"I showed her into the small reception room, my lady."

"Well, in ten minutes, Hobson—not before—bring her up to my boudoir. You needn't say that his lordship can't receive her. Just say that she must wait a few moments, and in ten minutes bring her up to me."

"Very good, my lady."

Marta's mind was so constituted that it could hold only one thing at a time, but often it held that one thing remarkably well. She banished Jenny Gideon from it and took on the interesting problem of Lila Roche. This woman who had thought to entangle Alan would receive a small surprise when she was ushered into the presence of his mother. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, she was a woman accustomed to dealing with men. Lady Moorhill thought she knew the type—at a distance.

Emma Hartford was summoned. Marta demanded her loveliest peignoir, the one of lace and ermine, with a boudoir cap to match which had ermine tails falling with coquettish effect over each ear. She touched up her com-

plexion again and finally composed herself on the cushioned couch in her favorite attitude.

"Miss Roche, my lady," announced Hobson, true to time.

Jenny stood in the doorway, a little bewildered. Lady Moorhill was the last person in the world she wished to see. Yet it was not altogether unreasonable: this was Lady Moorhill's own house.

"I'm very sorry," she said. "I asked for Lord Moorhill."

"My husband is not very well. The doctor has ordered him to bed and he's been given a sleeping draft. This strange escapade of my son's—you will forgive me, Miss Roche—has completely upset Lord Moorhill. Please sit down. Is there anything I can do for you?"

As she spoke Marta ran a sharp eye over the visitor. Miss Roche was not in the least what she had expected. She was older, for one thing, considerably older than Alan. It was evident that she had not dressed for effect, and that puzzled Marta, who had hysterically rearranged her own toilette. The Parisian revue artiste, renowned for spectacular display, was costumed in a tweed coat and skirt, her gorgeous hair almost obliterated by a little, brown, "pull-on" hat. Could such simplicity be a pose?

"Do sit down. It makes me uncomfortable to see you standing," Marta urged.

"Thank you. I wanted to see Lord Moorhill, but it doesn't matter. I'm sorry he's ill. Will he be better tomorrow, do you think?"

Marta abandoned her own pose. She was furious, but principally because this woman was so different from what she had expected.

"What do you want, Miss Roche? Why have you come here?"

"I told you: to see Lord Moorhill. As I can't see him I'll go."

CHAPTER XIV.

Trembling from head to foot, Jenny found herself safely outside. Her experience had been brief, but very terrible. That woman was Norry's *wife*.

What madness had led her to that house? Lady Moorhill's imperative questions rang in her ears: "What do you want? Why have you come here?" Why, indeed?

It was because of a feeling that she could not explain even to herself, one of those stupendous blunders which the wisest souls may make. Norry had asked her to forgive him. It seemed necessary, somehow, to set his mind at rest on that score. Forgiveness is easy, but the acceptance is hard. Oh, a cruel path for Norry to tread!

She turned and looked back at the house, paused a brief moment. There was a light in the vestibule and a faint glimmer from a window above. That wasn't Lady Moorhill's room; perhaps it was Norry's.

Her mind ranged back. She saw herself as a very young wife—what the modern "movie" would describe as a child-wife. She saw herself as a mother, and then bereaved; as an aging woman at twenty-two; as an ignorant, heartbroken woman, abandoned by the husband she adored. He had cast her aside as so much junk, written her off on his ledger as a bad debt. He had done all this for Marta Staines.

Jenny wondered. What, after all, is love? Is there such a thing? Perhaps the cynics have the best of it. They take what they can get and expect less. Wealth had turned Norry's head. How many happy wives owe their good fortune in a martial sense to poverty? It would be interesting to know, if one could get statistics.

She boarded an omnibus haphazard and climbed to the top. It conveyed her to Victoria station. A "lost, strayed or stolen" feeling possessed her.

Mary might be wondering what had

happened; it was past ten. She went into a public telephone booth and rang up her rooms at the Carlton. Mary was occupying herself with patience, but proposed to retire immediately. Alan Staines had called; he said he was going around to his studio and would be expecting a message there.

Jenny took a taxi to Chelsea. All the way she kept saying to herself: "I mustn't hurt Alan; above everything else, I mustn't hurt him."

Destroy his faith in her? No, not that, either. No sacrifice of self-respect could be demanded. She certainly would not pretend to Alan that she was a different sort of woman from the one he believed her to be. She was utterly miserable when she tapped at his door.

"Alan, dear!"

"Lila! This is frightfully jolly of you. I say, where did you get to? It's bothered me something 'orrible! Look at the mess I'm in. I meant to pack but I've been wandering about doing nothing at all, thinking—and that leads nowhere."

"Doesn't it? Don't be too sure, Alan. It's only thinking that leads anywhere."

"My darling girl, what's the matter with you?"

He took her by the shoulders and turned her toward the light. It was rather eerie in the big, vaulted room. Their tall shadows made ghostly silhouettes upon the wall.

"Alan, do you love me very much?"

"Love you!"

"No, no, dear. Don't kiss me. Let me tell you something. I've been thinking, too, thinking hard."

"Lila, you're not——"

"Wait a moment. Alan, do you know that I'm more than ten years older than you are? In a few years my youth will be gone forever. It would be dreadful, simply *dreadful,* for us both if you stopped caring for me."

"My darling, my darling! As though I ever could! Oh, Lila, don't talk like that, don't! What does age matter? Mother's considerably older than the pater—but anyway, you and I needn't compare ourselves with them or anybody else. We're just 'us,' and you're the most adorable woman in the world. I'm not half good enough for you."

"Alan, dear, I can't do it."

"Do you mean you won't marry me?"

"Yes."

"Lila, don't you love me?"

"Not enough; not as a woman ought to love the man she marries. I loved my first husband, Alan, and he broke my heart past mending. It isn't in me to love twice like that. You must let me go, dear. It would ruin your life if we married."

"Oh, don't put it on to me. I'm perfectly willing to take the risk." His voice broke. "Lila—Lila!"

"Please forgive me, Alan. Some day perhaps you'll thank me."

He flung himself onto a couch and buried his face against a cushion. His shoulders were shaking.

"Oh, Alan, my dear, dear boy! If only I didn't have to hurt you."

"Oh, Alan, my dear! If only I didn't have to hurt you so!"

It was still the same: a look from him sent her senses reeling.

She bent down, stroked his hair, and left a compassionate kiss.

"Moorhill's responsible for this," he cried.

A door closed gently and he started up. She had gone, and he was alone with his anguish.

CHAPTER XV.

"I buried Jenny Gideon, but I think I'll dig her up again. After all, the poor soul has a right to her own existence, and I'm sick to death of Lila Roche!"

Mary Foley, who was doing her hair at the dressing table, smiled indulgently.

"By all means," she said. "When does the disinterment take place?"

"As soon as I can manage it."

"And what's to become of Lila Roche? Is she going to the empty grave?"

"No, she thinks of traveling for her health. Possibly she'll end up in a convent."

"But she's so well known, Jenny."

"Not in London."

"Good heavens, are you staying in London!" Mary, who had adopted Paris for her very own, could not conceive of such a strange idea.

"Well, yes, for the present at least. I've been looking about for a house, Mary, and I think I've found it. Only they want such a ghastly premium."

"You have a house," Mary said stubbornly.

"But that's in Paris."

"Really, you are tiresome, my dear. Resurrect Jenny Gideon if you like. It would only create a nine days' wonder even if the press discovered that you were once the wife of the great Lord Moorhill. But why abandon Paris? You have no friends here; you'll be utterly miserable."

"I'm that, any way."

Mary twisted around to get a better view of her friend.

"I believe you like being miserable. If you were so fond of the Staines child, why on earth did you break off your engagement? At the eleventh hour, too! It seemed too silly."

"It was silly to have thought of marrying him in the first place," Jenny said with a sigh. "You know you didn't approve."

"Of course I didn't. Still, I'd like you to be happy. Have you seen Lord Moorhill again?"

"Yes, once," Jenny admitted. She added rather hurriedly: "Dear me, it's nearly eleven and I have an appointment with the house agent at half past. I must fly."

"Wait a minute. The agent will keep. I want to ask you something." Mary got up. She looked worried and anxious. "Jenny, that man broke you once. Don't forget that. I wonder if you remember how pitiful you were when you came to me that night in Sydney and said you were going to end it all?"

"Oh, Mary, I don't want to remember. I want to forget."

"It won't help you much if you stay here on London. Norris Gideon broke you once; he might just as well have killed you. I've been hearing things

about him. They say he's a man without a conscience, as ruthless in business as in other things. Is he behind this idea of taking a house in London?"

Jenny flushed.

"He doesn't know anything about it."

"That isn't an answer to my question."

"Of course he's not behind it. What ridiculous notions you get into your head!"

Nevertheless, Jenny felt slightly guilty as she set forth that morning. She hadn't been quite honest with her friend, and there was no doubt that she owed even more to Mary than Mary did to her. But for Mary Foley she would have gone mad or killed herself during that terrible time in Sydney. It wasn't until the question had been put to her directly that Jenny realized what was actually behind her idea of taking a small house in London: Lord Moorhill, to be exact. And she had told Mary Foley a deliberate untruth. Well, people shouldn't ask questions like that; one has a right to defend oneself.

It was true that Norry was the sort of man who got what he wanted regardless of conscience or consequences. No one knew that better than Jenny Gideon, but the years had taught her stern lessons. She told herself that he could never break her again.

She went to the house agent's, transacted her business, and spent the balance of the morning with a firm of decorators. She would have the bulk of her furniture sent over from Paris. It was a charming little house she had discovered in Victoria Square, tiny to look at from outside but roomy enough for her needs. It backed onto the private gardens of a hotel, and there was one room, oak-paneled, which had decided her to take the house in spite of the heavy premium demanded.

Emerging from the decorators' in Sloane Street, she looked at her watch, and then almost furtively signaled the driver of a passing taxicab and gave him the address of a restaurant in the city.

What would Mary say if she knew? Well, strictly speaking, it wasn't any of her business. She took a telegram from her hand bag and read it through again although she already knew it by heart.

> If convenient will you lunch with me today one-thirty at Chappell's in Queen Victoria Street; will expect you if no reply.
>
> MOORHILL.

She had not replied and she was now on her way to the restaurant, a vision in cool green that set off her hair and complexion to their best advantage, and wearing the most becoming of the season's wide-brimmed hats. There was an air of quiet elegance about her that would have surprised any one who had known her in the old Moorhill days. For that, Mary Foley was partially responsible. Mary had made a cult of dressing "Lila Roche."

The restaurant was a big, old-fashioned place, the rendezvous of city magnates. Few wives found their way so far east, and by mutual consent of the habitués were not especially encouraged to do so. Yet the feminine element was by no means lacking. Many a young typist or girl clerk took the first step on a dangerous turning at Chappell's.

Moorhill was waiting just inside the lobby when Jenny arrived. Several people looked at them curiously as he piloted her upstairs. For while he himself lunched here pretty well every week day, this was the first time he had ever escorted a woman.

There was an air of quiet discretion about the room upstairs, no overcrowding, no cheap clatter of cutlery and rushing about of distracted waitresses. The tables were partitioned off pew-wise with screens of polished mahogany, and the floor deadened with a red velvet carpet; sad-faced and flat-footed Eng-

lish waiters, mostly beyond the age limit and with whiskers preserved from the early eighties, padded about, attending to the needs of the patrons. The food was of the best to be had in any country in the world, and the vintage wines unsurpassed.

"It was good of you to come, Jenny," Moorhill said as they seated themselves.

She felt his keen eyes appraising her in a possessive, masterful way, and a tremor swept over her, leaving her a little faint. It had been like that when she was a very young girl. A mere look or touch from him had sent her senses reeling. To be annihilated again? No, it was impossible. Where fire has passed, a second conflagration is impossible.

"Was it something special you wanted to see me about?" she asked.

"To tell you the truth, no. I just wanted to see you," Moorhill replied bluntly.

"I wonder why, Norry?"

"I don't know—except that I'm feeling a bit jaded. Have you heard from Alan?"

"No. Has he gone away?"

"Oh, I supposed you knew. He's gone to Brittany. I say, waiter!"

Jenny lowered her eyes in which the tears had suddenly gathered. Poor Alan! Their honeymoon was to have been spent in Brittany, and he was there alone. Ah, well, time is a great healer.

It was characteristic of Moorhill that he did not consult her as to what they should have for lunch. He ordered cold salmon to be followed by duckling and green peas, and a bottle of Chablis.

"Marta told me only this morning that you called to see me that night. I gave the footman a piece of my mind. He should have brought the message to me."

"But you were ill," Jenny said. "I'm awfully sorry, Norry. I shouldn't have come to your house."

"Why on earth not? It *is* my house, I suppose. What made you change your mind about marrying Alan?"

"I don't know. Well, yes, I do. It wouldn't have been fair to him. I thought over what you'd said. In a few years he would have tired of me, a young husband with a middle-aged wife. It would be a dreary situation for us both."

"Was that your only reason?" Moorhill asked. Again his keen gaze swept her, and again she experienced a sensation of faintness. She drank a little wine.

"I don't suppose I cared enough for him—in that way—to take so big a risk," she said. "It wasn't only myself I had to think of. Alan is a splendid fellow. He's hurt now, but he'll get over it, and it's better that he should be hurt a little than drag through long years of regret."

Moorhill winced.

"Long years of regret," he repeated. "Jenny, that's what I'm doing: years of bitter regret."

The whip had been given into her hand, but she didn't know how to use it. That was Moorhill's cleverness.

She found herself chatting with him as though he were a recent acquaintance whose flattering interest awakened a corresponding sentiment in her. She told him about the little house in Victoria Square and he made a note of the address.

"We're going to be good friends, aren't we, Jenny?" he asked a little wistfully.

She hesitated a moment, her soft brown eyes questioning him.

"I am not quite sure," she said.

'But why not? You told me you'd forgiven me. Heaven knows, I don't deserve it, but there it is—you said you had."

"Oh, it's easy to forgive, but friendship is quite another matter. I don't believe it's possible between you and me, Norry. You see, we were once hus-

band and wife. We—or at least I—can't forget that."

"You mean that you still care for me?" He leaned toward her, powerfully magnetic, a dangerous man to any woman should he choose to be so.

Her heart pounded in a sickening fashion.

"Care for you!" She laughed nervously and shrugged her shoulders. "My dear Norry, don't be absurd. I was only thinking of the impossibility of what you suggested. You and I are about the last two people who would be permitted friendship with each other. You are a very well-known man. I, also, have had my share of publicity. The world would be scandalized."

"How much I care for the world, is that!" Moorhill illustrated his contempt with a snap of the fingers.

"Or for me," she said cheerfully.

"That's not true. Of course I haven't the slightest intention of making you conspicuous, Jenny. At the same time, I want to see you now and again. My life's just an empty shell, a sheer mockery of what I thought it was to be."

"You made your life, Norry."

He pulled a wry smile. "It was a poor job."

"You got what you wanted."

"What I thought I wanted, you mean. That's a very different matter."

"And now you think you want—my friendship."

He said nothing, but again he gave her that penetrating glance which made her heart beat furiously and told her that, in common with every other woman in the world, she was a frail thing in the hands of the man she loved.

CHAPTER XVI.

The London season was in full swing and Lady Moorhill had suddenly decided to pull herself together and take her share in it. The atmosphere of the big house in Park Lane had undergone some subtle change. Marta became aware of it as a hound picks up a scent.

She made a point of seeing more of her husband than had been usual for several years past. She wanted him to go about with her, and she arranged a series of political dinner parties at home. Heretofore Moorhill had grumbled because she shirked social duties; now he complained the other way. He was bored by the politicians and their wives, who all wanted something, either his money or his services. He was offered the highest post in the government of Australia, and declined it. He was asked to subscribe to the funds of a new party which fancied itself as coming into power; and he refused, although the subscription, had he given what was asked, would have insured him its leadership. From a man whose whole vision had been focused upon personal ambition, he became as listless in a social sense as the most supine beneficiary of the dole.

It was increasingly clear to Lady Moorhill that he possessed a secret. She watched him furtively and discovered that he was doing the same with her. They circled each other with the wariness of well-matched boxers.

Marta was content as far as her son was concerned. She gave Moorhill the credit for having stopped that most unsuitable alliance, but she did not know why she was right. Alan was painting in Brittany, and Anna Lancing had changed her mind about going to Canada. There was hope still in that quarter.

But being at ease regarding Alan, gave Marta more leisure to study her husband's case. Something had changed Norry. Her wifely intuition leaped to the conclusion that it must be a woman.

He was very gentle with her, too gentle. He went out of his way to do little kind things. When she was irritating he seemed not to notice. On the anni-

versary of their wedding day he made her a magnificent gift of jewelry. It was very seldom indeed that he ever remembered the date of his own accord.

A less sophisticated woman than Marta would have accepted all these little signs as good omens, but she understood men much better than she did her own sex. She received his gifts for what they were, tokens of a troubled conscience.

A woman is never too old to be jealous. In the case of Marta Moorhill, jealousy bred dislike of its object. The kinder her husband, the more suspicious she became, and the more faultfinding. When they were married he had settled a fortune on her of which she had always allowed him the handling. It suddenly occurred to her to demand a reckoning and the strict establishment of a separate estate.

This request came at an ill moment for Moorhill. He tried to dissuade her from her decision and disclosed the fact that he was using some of her securities to back up a heavy financial enterprise of his own. She flew off to her lawyer and discovered that had Moorhill not been her husband she could have landed him in a very unpleasant position.

That evening, after a very troublesome day on the Exchange, Moorhill learned that his wife was not to be trifled with.

There had been half a dozen people to dinner, who fortunately, from his point of view, were going on afterward to the opera. He himself was not expected to accompany them. It was recognized that such things bored him. At the last moment, when they were getting their cloaks, it became apparent that Marta had begged off although her box was put at their disposal.

"You will forgive me, won't you? I can't always be running away from Norry, can I? Poor dear, yes; the city's a fearfully exciting place these days, isn't it?"

Moorhill ground his teeth. He had hoped she would go, counted upon it.

When the door had closed upon the last of them he flew off to his study and was buried breast-deep in legal-looking papers by the time that Marta tracked him down.

"Norry, I hope you have a minute to spare," she began. Her voice was very drawly, very "sweet pickley," indeed.

"As many as you like," he replied, repressing a sigh.

"I was a little uneasy when you told me you'd been using some of my securities to finance the Breakwater Copper Company," she said. "I went down to see Trench about it this afternoon."

Moorhill gave an exclamation of dismay.

"You didn't!" he cried.

"Why not, Norry? He's my solicitor."

Her husband shrugged his shoulders.

"Quite so. Trench is your solicitor, but he happens to have a few other clients as well. He's Bathurst's lawyer, too."

"Who's Bathurst?"

"Only the one man in the world I don't want to know that I'm in the very least pressed for money. Only about the one man who'd give a cool fifty thousand or so to know exactly how I do stand."

"But my dealings with Trench are confidential," Marta protested. "As though he would tell one client anything about another's business!"

"Ha!" Moorhill gave a cynical laugh. "Would you mind telling me precisely what information you gave Trench?" He seized a couple of papers, glared at them, and then stripped them into bits.

"You needn't blame me, Norry. I have a right to protect my own interests, even against you."

"What did you tell him?"

"Only that I'd asked for a separate estate and you said it was inconvenient.

He was frightfully surprised. He said he hadn't the faintest idea that you would dare to do such a thing without my consent."

"He knows very well that I couldn't do it without your consent," Moorhill said with misleading gentleness. "You gave me your power of attorney years ago."

"That was when I trusted you. I want it back now. I can 'revoke' it, Trench said."

"Good heavens, Marta, do you imagine I want to rob you?"

"I don't know what you might do. You've been so queer lately. Something's come over you. Anyway, I've put everything into Trench's hands, and he'll probably demand an accounting from you to-morrow. I'm not going to have my money played about with on hair-brained schemes."

"Whose word is that? Trench's?"

Marta bit her lip.

"Really, Norry, we might discuss this amicably!"

"How can we, when you go behind my back and do something which may, without exaggeration, ruin me? I confess you've taken me rather by surprise, Marta. Bathurst is pounding me quite sufficiently as it is, but at least he's a fair adversary. It's his business to pound me; it's to his advantage. But it isn't to yours."

"You've got to account for those securities," Marta said stubbornly. "I have to think of myself—and of Alan. What would happen to us if anything went wrong with you? And you've been so queer lately——"

"You said that before, and I heard you. Nothing is likely to happen to me if you leave me alone. How dare you meddle anyway?"

"Meddle? I like that. You help yourself to my money, and then when I say I won't have it you call it meddling. Trench says——"

"I don't want to hear any more of what Trench says. I've heard enough. Whew!" Moorhill passed a hand across his forehead. The night was stifling. He crossed to one of the windows and jerked back the heavy curtains to let in some air. That unpleasant throbbing sensation was on him again. The doctor had said something about high blood pressure. That was the latest fashionable complaint, Moorhill supposed.

"You're quite determined to have your pound of flesh, I take it," he said.

"It is very unkind to put it like that, Norry."

"Well, I'll put it differently. You want me to withdraw these securities of yours from my own account, and hand them over to Trench. You propose to revoke the power of attorney you gave me. In short, at a most vital moment, you propose to leave me stranded in a very dry ditch?"

"I can't see what it has to do with me. Yes, I do want those securities under my own control. All the more reason if you're going bankrupt!"

He wondered if it was worth while to explain to her that he would not go bankrupt if she left him alone; that he could in an emergency replace her borrowed capital with his own, but that the whole transaction was of such a delicate and critical nature that the mere deed of transfer would arouse grave suspicion of the soundness of his enterprise. That it was perfectly sound, he not only believed, but knew. The scheme involved millions, and Lord Moorhill was not a man who could afford to beg from his friends or the public. He had had every confidence in being able to swing this deal single-handed, and he could do so if Marta would leave him alone.

Was it worth while explaining to her? She, too, would benefit by his success.

He shrugged his shoulders. Very likely the mischief was already done. When a man's own wife gets nervous and demands the withdrawal of her

support, who is to know what lies behind? His own honesty might easily be questioned. "Oh, yes," they would say, "he saw it coming and got his wife clear of the smash. Usual thing."

For all Moorhill knew, Trench might happen to be a perfectly straight lawyer, but even so, the transaction was bound to come out. It could not be kept a secret from the Breakwater Copper Company directors, and Lionel Bathurst would get wind of it about as quickly as it took his brokers to telephone him.

Against this stubborn woman Moorhill found himself chained as helplessly as Prometheus of old, and no Hercules was in sight to free him.

He did try to explain to her. He was as gentle, as patient as the circumstances and his irritable frame of mind would permit. But he knew from the very first that it was hopeless. She was possessed of but one idea, and the more he argued, the more fixed that idea became. Indeed, his obvious necessity only convinced her that it would be rash to trust him any further.

She derived a certain smug satisfaction from his plight. She was "paying him back" for the queerness he had displayed lately; for his unwonted gentleness and consideration, and the gift of expensive jewelry; for the secret he possessed and which she had not yet fathomed.

To be sure, she had fathomed enough of it to make her very bitter. The secret was a woman; that much she knew. The husband of a friend of hers had seen them lunching together in a city restaurant and reported it to his wife, who told Marta. She had questioned Moorhill but he had flatly denied the charge. She knew quite well that he was lying. And there had been another occasion when she found a pair of woman's gloves tucked under a cushion in her own car after her husband had, as he said, motored down alone to Brighton to attend a business conference. They were very beautiful gloves of soft French suède, a delicate gray in color, faintly perfumed.

Neither Moorhill nor the chauffeur—she had humiliated herself to question the latter—had the faintest idea how those gloves found their way into the car. In this instance, two men had lied, one to uphold the other.

But men cannot always have it their own way. Lady Moorhill's opportunity had arrived, and she was taking full advantage of it.

"That's your last word, then?"

"Absolutely," she replied.

"You fully realize what it may mean?"

"I feel sure, Norry, that you are exaggerating."

"I told you I'm not. I may be ruined."

"You can always have a home with me, dear."

When she said that, Moorhill understood something which had puzzled him before: Why Some Men Hit Their Wives. Naturally he did not act upon his sudden enlightenment, but it was interesting to be able to understand.

"Very well, then there's no more to he said. Good night, Marta. I have a lot of work to do."

"You're not angry with me, Norry?"

"Of course not. You are quite within your rights. So was Shylock. I always felt they treated him rather shabbily."

She got up and trailed off toward the door. Suddenly she paused.

"You thought I'd forgotten those gloves," she said.

Moorhill stared at her. Then he laughed.

"Oh?" he said. "That's as it may be. I fancy the lady of the gloves has a more logical grievance against me than you have. But she has never mentioned it."

"You—you admit it, then? Of course I knew that both you and Babcock lied——"

"I have nothing of vital importance to you to admit," he said coldly.

"You'll soon discover how fond she is of you, if you go bankrupt."

"Unfortunately for me, she is not fond of me now—financially or otherwise. Not in the way you mean."

He heaved a prodigious sigh when his wife shut the door upon herself. Why had he been such a fool as to bicker with her about Jenny's gloves?

Although technically Marta was right about his handling of her money, in theory she was wrong. She had given him a power of attorney. For years he had acted upon his own discretion, and she was far richer now than he had made her on their wedding day. It was plain that she would not be ill-pleased if he actually was ruined.

It was entirely his own fault; he could blame no one else; least of all could he blame Marta. To be sure, she had sung her siren song in his ear many years ago, but the greater fault had been in heeding it. He had sinned deliberately. And now, so late, there hovered over him the monstrous shadow of that sin.

He pushed the mass of papers aside and buried his face in his hands.

"Jenny—Jenny!" he muttered.

It had been several weeks since he had seen her. She had not encouraged him to come frequently. Had his will been given free rein he would have been with her every hour, every minute. Because of her he could scarcely fix his mind on anything else.

He leaned back in the deep swing chair and mechanically his gaze fastened upon the clock on the mantel. It was barely ten. In about eight minutes he could if he chose, be begging admittance to the little house in Victoria Square.

She might not see him; she might be out, or entertaining visitors. He would not risk ringing up for fear of disappointment.

"Hobson, a taxi, please."

"Very good, my lord."

And within the eight minutes he found himself standing on Jenny's doorstep.

It was Félicie, the dour-faced, middle-aged maid, who answered the bell. He was afraid of Félicie; instinct told him that she did not approve of him.

"No, m'sieu', madame 'as not retired. If m'sieu' will be so good as to wait a moment."

"Tell Mrs. Gideon that it's very im-

"He said to me, 'Cab, lady?' and it was Bill—Bill Soames!"

portant. I must see her a few moments if possible."

He raised his voice, hoping that Jenny herself might be at the top of the little dark flight of stairs. She had denied him entrance often, always through Félicie who was her shield and buckler.

Above lay that oak-paneled room which had decided her to take the little house, despite its heavy premium. Jenny spent most of her time in that room, and she was there now.

"Yes, it's all right, Félicie. Come up, Norry."

He stripped off his light overcoat and threw it onto a settee together with his hat and gloves.

Her sweet, fresh voice—the voice of Jenny Gideon, of old Moorhill days! She called herself Mrs. Gideon, now. He was glad of that.

CHAPTER XVII.

"What is it, Norry? What's the matter?"

There was a sharp ring of alarm in Jenny's voice. She laid a hand on his arm, pressing it anxiously.

"Nothing's the matter," he replied.

Then he caught a glimpse of his face reflected in the mirror behind her, and understood what had prompted her anxiety. He was ghastly, with bluish shadows under his eyes, like a man half dead. It gave him as much of a shock as it did her.

"But Norry——"

"It's really nothing. I'm tired out, that's all. This weather would kill a dog, and I've been so infernally busy—not enough time to get any fresh air. Oh, let me sit down and rest for a little while."

Jenny pushed a chair close to the wide, latticed windows which overlooked the hotel gardens. The blinds were not drawn and a little breeze found its way into the room.

Moorhill sank down with a sigh and his glance followed her wistfully as she hurried out of the room. So sweet and graceful she looked in a soft white dress, arms bare to the elbows and neck a little low. In a few moments she was back again with a tray.

"I've mixed you a very mild whisky-and-soda, with just the merest dash of ice in it. I think it will do you good, Norry. Of course you know you may smoke if you like."

"Thank you, Jenny."

She picked up her embroidery frame and bent over it with serious eyes. She had successfully fought Norry in his masterful mood—not only him but herself as well—but this was another matter. He said he was tired but he looked really ill, and she wondered how she could so control her pity that it did not fling her into his arms. Thank Heaven, Mary Foley was staying with her!

She told him that Mary was visiting her, but had gone with some friends to a theater. Human nature being what it is, Moorhill felt no sense of gratitude to Mary Foley for all she had done for Jenny. He actively resented her. Like Félicie, she did not approve of him, and he had convinced himself—by what sophistry one does not pretend to know—that were it not for Mary Foley he would have made greater strides in his friendship with his former wife.

He picked up the old argument, but this time on a plaintive note.

"If only I could see you now and again, Jenny, I should be so much happier. You know I promised you I'd ask for nothing more than—than just friendship. It seems such a little thing to ask, such a little thing to give—only an hour now and then, like this."

Jenny lifted grave eyes from her needlework.

"Now and again there has been an hour—like this," she reminded him.

"Only four times in two months."

"It's more than should have been. That day we motored to Brighton I

felt—well, Norry, it seemed as though I was doing something I shouldn't."

"Look here." He bent toward her. "I did wrong. In the eyes of God you and I are still man and wife."

"Norry! Did you ever hear that two wrongs never make a right?"

"I didn't expect anything so commonplace from you," he reproached her.

She flushed angrily.

"Oh, will nothing, *nothing* make you see yourself as you really are?" she cried. She hadn't meant to burst out like that, but it was done before she thought.

Moorhill passed a weary hand across his face.

"The trouble is, I see all too clearly what I am: a man who has sinned deeply. Is that admission any satisfaction to you? I am suffering for that sin, Jenny. What was it Mary Foley told you? That they say I have no conscience? Well, I wonder if that can truthfully be said of any one; I doubt it. Conscience is a queer thing; it may sleep peacefully for years. Mine roused now and again, but I will tell you when it definitely woke up; the night—that most curious night—when old Bill Soames drifted in and told me that you were dead. I knew then that I would never again in this world have another easy moment. Thank God, you weren't dead; thank God, Jenny, you were kind and forgave me. That has helped me wonderfully. I'm far from being an angel, as you know. All my life I've been laboring under a great illusion. I fancied that man's greatest battle was with the world, whereas it's with himself."

Jenny glanced at him shyly; her eyes were moist, and when she smiled, that tender smile which had been born when little Eddie was first laid in her arms, Moorhill's voice broke. Punishment, though deserved, is so very hard to bear.

"Oh, Norry, perhaps it's I who ought to ask your forgiveness. For years I've thought such hard things of you. You'd never guess what ideas of revenge possessed me. That was why I made myself over. I wanted you to be sorry you'd lost me, if ever we met again. I knew I could anger, perhaps hurt you through Alan Staines. You see, I'm not so perfect myself."

"What confessions!" Moorhill exclaimed with a sad laugh. "And you found when the opportunity came that you hadn't it in you to hurt anybody—even me. You didn't remake your gentle soul, Jenny. It was there, just you, all the time."

"If we go on like this we'll end Heaven knows where. I'm frightened, Norry, not of you but of myself. I'm so lonely. I get to thinking of the old days and time is washed away. It's as though there's nothing between then and now. I dream so much of Eddie. Do you remember that day we went picnicking on the ridge above Moorhill, and you made a little hammock for him out of my mackintosh?"

"Good lor', yes! We picked nearly a gallon of bilberries while he snoozed, the little beggar. It was about the first holiday I'd taken since we were married. Do you remember I bagged a couple of hares and some wood pigeons and you made a famous pie—— Hark! What's that?"

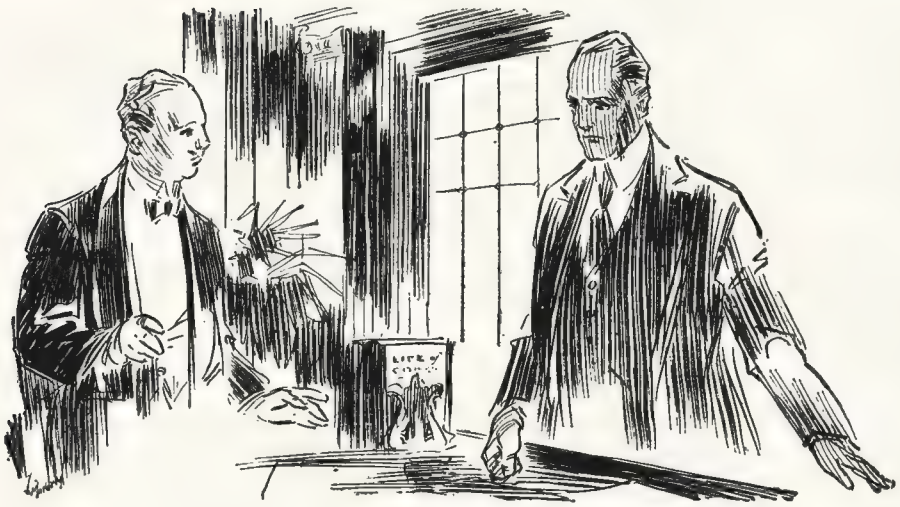
Jenny leaned forward, listening.

"It's Mary," she whispered. "She's come home, but there's some one with her."

"Will they come up here?" Moorhill did not want to meet strangers.

"She won't bring any one up without asking me."

There was a sharp tap of footsteps—Mary Foley might have been a girl from the way she took the stairs—and the door opened unceremoniously. She stood for a moment looking from one to the other of them, a trim little figure in one of her own smart evening frocks, her iron-gray hair severely coiffured.



"So Bathurst is a friend of yours!" Was this man a spy?

Bright spots burned in her usually sallow cheeks, and she radiated suppressed excitement.

"O—oh!" she exclaimed, her voice dropping flat. "How d'ye do, Lord Moorhill? I didn't expect to find you here." She flung her expensive-looking cloak onto the couch.

"I'm just going," he replied stiffly.

"Wait a moment. Perhaps this will interest you, too. It ought to. Jenny, who on *earth* do you think I ran into to-night?"

"I haven't an idea."

Miss Foley closed the door. "It's terrible—it's pitiful!"

"But, Mary——"

"Yes, I'll tell you. I'm quite sure Lord Moorhill will be thrilled."

The man's lips twisted in a wry smile. Her tone implied something unpleasant for him.

"I should enjoy that sensation," he murmured ironically.

Mary turned again to her friend. "Oh, Jenny dear, it was *too* pitiful! Just as we were leaving the theater it happened—or rather, shortly afterward. The Matlocks wanted to drive me home, of course, but I wouldn't let them. They're twelve miles into Essex, you know, and Mrs. Matlock was rather anxious to get home because of her baby. It's the first evening she's left him. So I persuaded them to go straight off. As though I couldn't manage to find a cab for myself! Well, it was a little difficult. There was such a crush, and all the commissionaires seemed to be engaged three deep. I started to look for one—and then it happened. A man came up to me—you know, one of those poor derelicts—and he said, 'Do you want a cab, lady?' I had to look twice at him to make sure, and then he recognized me. Jenny, it was Bill Soames. You remember him?"

"Good heavens!" Jenny cried. "But how could that be? Bill was rolling in money."

"He lost it," Mary interrupted.

Her laconic explanation gave Moorhill an idea of what might happen to him. It is easier to lose a fortune than to acquire one.

"He came to London with the little he had left, for a holiday, and one night he had his pocket picked by a man he was giving a free meal to. His letter case was taken, and it contained

his passport and return ticket to Sydney, as well as his money. He didn't know a soul in London"—Moorhill winced—"and so," Mary Foley concluded, "the poor old fellow has been getting along the best way he could."

"What did you do?" Jenny asked anxiously.

"Do? Well, I—well, what would you expect me to do?"

"Of course you brought him here!"

"I did. He needn't stay, but something must be done for him. He's downstairs in the lounge. He didn't want to come but I made him. I don't know what the taxicab driver thought, and moreover, I don't care. Jenny, I think he's hungry."

"Oh!" Jenny cried. "Let me go down alone, please. I want to see him quite alone at first. Bill was so kind to me once. Do you mind if I give him your supper, Mary? I know a tray has been left for you."

"*Mind!*"

Jenny sped off.

Mary Foley dipped into her bag and produced a cigarette case. Moorhill was a little premature with his match. He had to light a second one before she had chosen a cigarette, tapped it to her liking and fitted it into a holder.

"Thanks. As I said before, I didn't expect to find you here," she remarked.

"Didn't you? And I didn't know you are visiting Jenny," he replied.

"Or you wouldn't have come?"

"I don't say that."

Mary blazed out at him. "You broke her once. Doesn't that content you? You drove her to the very edge of the grave. Wasn't that enough? Must you really pitch her in before you can be quite happy?"

Moorhill shivered. Where was his dignity? He groped in vain for words that would put this woman into her proper place.

"I don't—want to hurt Jenny," was the best he could find.

"I don't believe you, but if you believe yourself try to leave her alone. Would you like to go now? She's in the dining room with Bill Soames. You can let yourself out, and she won't see you. I'll come down with you if you like."

"But Bill—I must do something for Bill."

"Oh, no, thanks. Jenny and I can look after him quite nicely. He just needs a friend or two to put him on his feet, and he has them."

CHAPTER XVIII.

It was humiliating to be so coldly set aside by Mary Foley, the one-time dressmaker of Moorhill village, but he could not help himself. How strangely time had dealt with all four of them! And then there flashed across Moorhill's memory an incident which had happened many years ago. It occurred when Bill and he were looking for gold and had almost given up hope of finding any. They were miles from the village which took its name from the great flat-topped mountain of their expectations, lying side by side under the stars smoking a bedtime pipe before crawling under canvas to sleep their gold-haunted dreams.

Bill Soames had said: "When we make our pile, Norry, p'r'aps I'll get married, same's you done. I'll marry Mary Foley if she'll have me. But like's not she won't. She's the brightest girl in Moorhill."

Had Bill ever asked her? She went to Sydney and established herself there before the mountain yielded up its treasure to Norris Gideon and Bill Soames. Perhaps Bill had never felt worthy of so priceless a maid. Anyway, to-night had brought a strange sequel to that old romance. Looking back, it was an amazing path they each had trodden—from lonely Moorhill to London. Of the four, it seemed as though Mary

Foley was the only one who had known what she was about.

The big man walked back to Park Lane. Such a sultry night it was. Had he merely fancied a breeze blowing from that garden into Jenny's oak-paneled room?

Moorhill wondered if he would dare to leave the office even for a fortnight that summer. Week-ends he abominated. But did he really want to get away from London? Marta would be going to Dinard as usual, he supposed, but he was not fond of the Continent. He liked to be where he could hear his own language spoken. Besides, the Breakwater Copper Company was going to require a lot of nursing, and he felt that if he so much as turned his back on the Exchange for a single session, for an hour even, somebody would attempt a massacre.

Oh, confound Marta, anyhow. Well, he had wanted her, and now he had her. She was his wife and it is an ancient privilege of wives to ruin their husbands.

As he entered the house and crossed the wide marble corridor to go to his study where business still awaited him, Alan came down the stairs. It was unusual to see the young man clad in tweeds in the evening. He was very sunburned.

Moorhill fought down the sense of antagonism which had animated him toward Marta's son since that night he discovered Jenny.

"Hello," he said with an attempt at amiability. "Thought you were rusticating in Brittany."

Would Alan try to find Jenny? What if he succeeded and discovered that she was Mrs. Gideon?

"I got back this evening," the young man replied.

He, too, did his best to repress his honest sentiments. The antagonism between the men was mutual.

"Were I in your place, I should have stayed away," Moorhill said. "London's already beginning to smell of asphalt and stale cabbage. Come in for a moment. I suppose you've been visiting your mother. I hope she's shown herself more friendly toward you than she was toward me when last we parted."

Alan's teeth closed upon his under lip. Why should he be angry? He was quite used to Moorhill's lightly ironical remarks about his mother. They had never seemed to mean anything before, but to-night they struck him as sinister. For an hour he had been hearing things, most unpleasant things. Marta had managed to distil sheer poison into his ears without doing more than slightly distort the truth.

He had learned for the first time that Moorhill was already married when he met his present wife, and that he had been divorced in order to contract this advantageous marriage. Lady Moorhill impressed upon her son that she, herself had been an innocent victim of the plot. It was only recently that she had learned about it, she said.

Upon this disclosure followed others more up to date. There was the unknown Lady of the Gloves, presumably the same woman with whom Moorhill had been seen lunching at a city restaurant where men sometimes took their typists, but never their wives. And last of all, there was the damning discovery of the borrowed securities. Small wonder that Alan Staines could hold but scant approval of his stepfather, setting aside the great, outstanding fact that in some mysterious way Moorhill's interference had destroyed his own romance.

He loitered into the study, wondering cynically what it was that people saw in Lord Moorhill which had resulted in putting the man on a pedestal. Not for his goodness—oh, no. In these days pedestals weren't erected for anything so childlike. Of course he was

enormously rich, but even now there had to be a little of something else.

"And he's hollow," said Alan to himself, "just a hollow wind bag. A bang would burst him."

Moorhill was quite unconscious of these harsh deductions. He was mainly occupied with trying to convince himself that he mustn't hate Alan merely because the boy had fallen in love with Jenny. As she herself might say, that would be unfair.

"Sit down, Alan. Have a drink."

"No, thanks."

"Tell us about yourself. What's the program now?"

"I think it would not interest you, sir. As a matter of fact, there's nothing specially new. I've sold another picture."

"By Jove, that's good! I must look in at your studio one day."

"Thanks." Alan lit a cigarette. When he had got it going he said, "By the way, I've written to the cashier about that joke which is called my 'salary.' I told him to stop it. I can't go on taking money I don't earn."

Moorhill made an understanding grimace, with a downward twist of the lips, his shoulders hunched, his head inclined sidewise. It was an Oriental gesture.

"As you please, my boy. It isn't grudged you, and some day you might want to come back to your desk."

"That's not likely." Alan laughed bitterly. Then he said: "It's a great pity you can't see yourself as you really are."

Astonishment swept the man clean off his balance. Not more than an hour and a half ago, perhaps less, Jenny had made practically the same statement. It was amazing. And old Bill Soames held him in too great contempt to ask his help! Mary Foley, too—oh, well, she scarcely counted. Jenny alone looked upon him with kindly eyes, and that was the strangest part of it all, for she was the only person he had ever deliberately set out to injure.

"What am I, then?" he asked. He felt completely bewildered. He was not even angry.

"As far as I know," Alan said slowly, "you're merely just a liar, a libertine and a thief. I only regret that I've been unable to persuade my mother to leave you."

Moorhill gasped.

"And now, with your permission, I'll bid you good night," said Alan.

A thin, but faintly amused smile trickled across his stepfather's features.

"You have my permission," he replied.

There was something pathetic in the way the boy stalked out of the room. He had had his say, yet he did not feel that he had come off victor. He had not even roused the monster to anger.

Moorhill took up his pen and glanced at the clock. It was just upon midnight.

He was right. His enemy's agent had done his work well.

"It's interesting to be sized up by one's family," he muttered. "I've had it from all sides to-night."

He pulled the desk light a little closer and plunged into his work.

CHAPTER XIX.

Two months slid away.

To Moorhill they passed like a nightmare, quickly gone yet paradoxically endless by reason of the horrors they held. A dozen times he had averted ruin as by a miracle. His enemies suspected but they did not absolutely know and therefore could not count upon the desperate straits in which he found himself. Bad luck caught him on every side. To begin with, there was "the pound of flesh" which Marta had demanded. It was carved away and left him sorely wounded.

Yet he tried to be just. Alan Staines had called him a thief. So he would have been, had he fallen and dragged his wife's marriage settlement with him.

No, no! Not that. She had told him to deal with her securities as he saw fit, and he had used them as he would have used his own. On that score, he was *not* a thief. He repudiated his first stern verdict.

A more than ordinary summer-time depression had settled over the spirit of the Stock Exchange. Financiers clung to town or came creeping back uneasily. Politics were upset anyhow, and the international situation had never been more chaotic since the summer of nineteen hundred and fourteen.

Money was not merely scarce; it appeared to be nonexistent. The need of it dribbled down from the so-called millionaire who could not finance schemes which, if successful, would have given vast employment, to the so-called working man, grinding an organ in the streets because there was no work for him.

There was no panic, just depression. Moorhill had weathered many panics, and they had no terrors for him. He would have welcomed one at this crisis.

Mary Foley had taken Jenny away with her, and presumably she had also taken Bill Soames. The little house in Victoria Square was closed.

Marta had gone to Dinard and returned. It was now September.

Like Alan, Moorhill wondered that his wife chose, nominally, still to live with him. Their existences were quite separate now. They did not even dine together, which was the most appreciable break of all. From time to time her maid, Hartford, gave him some message or a report upon her mistress' health.

But Marta's health was really very much on the mend. She opened the autumn season early with a series of Sunday evening functions described in the illustrated papers as "a revival of the salon."

That, Moorhill supposed, accounted for some of the strange people he ran into occasionally. But could it altogether account for Cyril Sharp? He knew the young man's name because he had literally been waylaid by him.

"Lord Moorhill, isn't it?" Their first meeting had taken place in the corridor. "I'm giving a concert here on Thursday, and it would do me such a lot of good if you could manage to be present, Lord Moorhill."

"What d'ye mean? Who are you, anyway? A concert? I don't go to concerts."

Mr. Sharp, modestly abashed, explained who he was: a promising young baritone. To the financier, feeling particularly sour at the close of the most devastating day he had ever experienced, Cyril Sharp looked like something that the dog had dragged home in a decadent spirit of mischief.

There wasn't a mortal thing the matter with the promising young baritone, really. It just happened that he was too dapper, blond and undersized for

Moorhill's taste. His maize-colored hair had a middle parting, and his eyes were a bright, corn-flower blue. Whatever else he might lack, it was not assurance.

"But won't you make a point of coming to my concert?" pleaded Mr. Sharp, looking as though he might burst into tears. "It would do me such a lot of good. My patron, Mr. Lionel Bathurst, thinks a great deal of my voice."

"Oh, is Bathurst your patron?"

Moorhill's cigar traveled thoughtfully from one corner of his mouth to the other.

"He discovered me," Mr. Sharp explained. "And Lady Moorhill has been so kind. The concert's on Thursday at three o'clock. I do hope you'll come. The tickets are only a guinea. Perhaps you might like to take several and pass them on to your musical friends."

Mr. Sharp abstracted a letter case from his pocket, but at a gesture from the other returned it.

"I have no musical friends, and I'm afraid I'll be too busy on Thursday."

It was unkind; Moorhill felt that he had wounded a dove; but the mention of Bathhurst's name set his teeth on edge. Who knew whether the promising young baritone might not be a spy?

Thereafter Moorhill ran into Mr. Cyril Sharp quite frequently. He forgot what was taking place on Thursday and arrived home early to find the house throbbing with melody. Hobson, in the rôle of ticket collector, had been stationed at the entrance to the ballroom. The dining room was transformed into the semblance of a Bond Street tea room, but with a profusion of flowers which glorified it beyond all reason.

Moorhill darted into his study and discovered a gentleman's cloakroom. Among a welter of top hats and walking sticks sat Mr. Sharp, looking somewhat disconsolate. He was awaiting the rather long turn of the violinist. Unfortunately, he had chosen to sit in Moorhill's chair at Moorhill's desk.

It is more merciful to draw a veil over what immediately happened. Suffice it to tell that in something less than five minutes there remained in the study not so much as a stray pair of gentleman's gloves, to say nothing of hats, sticks, or Mr. Cyril Sharp.

Moorhill was so angry that he dared not trust himself to see Marta even when her last guest had departed. He had a few words to say to Hobson, however.

Hobson, profoundly dejected, could defend himself only on the score that her ladyship had given the orders.

"Her ladyship didn't expect you home so soon, my lord," he explained. "I am very sorry, my lord, very sorry, indeed. It shall never happen again."

"If it does," Moorhill promised him, "out you go on the spot. I hope you understand? There are two rooms and a bath in this house which belong to me. The study happens to be one of the rooms."

"Yes, my lord," murmured Hobson.

On Sunday evening one of the "revivals of the salon" was in progress. Moorhill returned home in the midst of it and was at the telephone in his study, trying to extract reluctant information from the caretaker of Jenny's house, when a discreet tap came at the door. He hung up the receiver in disgust. The caretaker either could not or would not say when Mrs. Gideon was returning to town.

"Who is it?" he called out.

His question was construed as permission to enter, and in came Cyril Sharp, treading daintily and wearing a pathetic, don't-hit-me expression.

"I only wanted to apologize," said Mr. Sharp. "But I can't feel that it was entirely my fault about the other day. I was told to come in here, although at the time I thought it was

rather peculiar having the artists wait in the gentlemen's cloakroom—not very well managed, as I complained to Lady Moorhill. She was quite unhappy about it, poor dear. Still, I feel that I ought to offer you my apology."

"Thanks," Moorhill growled ungraciously. "It was a misunderstanding on the servants' part."

"You're not angry with me, then?" the youth pleaded.

"No, not in the least. But I'm busy."

Mr. Sharp murmured further apologies and withdrew.

Moorhill's eyes narrowed, and he drummed on the edge of his desk. Suppose he hadn't happened to be here when Mr. Sharp came to apologize? What then? His gaze strayed to the niche where his great steel safe was screened by amber velvet curtains. Not even Marta knew the combination.

The whole revised plan of the Breakwater Copper Company's campaign dwelt behind those curtains, a delicately constructed plan of straw and brittle glass which depended for its preservation on the most careful of handling. And sometimes Moorhill left papers lying about in unlocked drawers. It was by no means a habit, merely an occasional lapse which surprised him as much as it would have pleased his enemies had they been able to take advantage of it.

Still, if this blond boy, this most incongruous of baritones, was Lionel Bathurst's agent, he had begun in a stupid fashion.

Moorhill found himself staring at the amber velvet curtains. Was it imagination, or did they look less carefully arranged than usual?

He strolled across and parted them.

The heavy doors of the safe swung slightly ajar. It was open, although no one in the world but Moorhill himself was supposed to know the combination.

He investigated hurriedly. It was as he fully expected. The revised plans of the Breakwater Copper Company were missing.

How to be Beautiful

by Dr. Augusta Winton

FACIAL MASSAGE

MASSAGE is one of the oldest methods employed to keep Father Time at bay. Thousands of years ago the Romans, while luxuriating in the "baths," had their bodies rubbed with perfumed oils. Thousands of years before that, the Chinese originated massage. In fact, it may surprise you to learn that the ladies of the Orient are past mistresses in all the gentle arts which enhance their attractiveness, and never appear in public without their "make-up."

Massage is a potent agent with which to keep the blood flowing freely through the tissues, to keep the flesh firm and the skin unlined, but it requires considerable skill to apply it properly. The inexperienced do themselves more harm than good. So it is a capital plan to pay a few visits to a competent masseuse and see for yourself just how it is done.

Once, indeed until very recent years, professionals were apt to apply massage with altogether too heavy a hand. They rubbed on the principle that if a little massage did good, more would do better. Instead, they succeeded only in bruising the delicate tissues, and after a course of facial treatments, the patient often found that her face sagged where it did not do so before.

A British physician once remarked that the masseur who rubbed a hole in his patient had mistaken his profession, and the same pertains to those who treat the face. Unless you are very sure in your selection of a well-trained masseuse, do not employ any one.

Now massage is a great beautifier; there is no doubt of this, when it is intelligently applied. An occasional treatment, however, is practically worthless. If you need facial massage, then you must take the time to give yourself this attention *every day*. With patient perseverance you will effect a marvelous change in a few weeks.

Massage must not be given hastily. Done that way, it is so much time and energy wasted. Seat yourself leisurely, in complete relaxation, before your mirror, and take an inventory of your needs. Does your face show lines upon the forehead? Do your brows pucker? Does your mouth droop at the corners? Do your cheeks sag slightly? Is there a line from the corners of the nose to the chin? Do the tissues feel soft and flabby instead of firm? If you have one or all of these defects, you need massage.

Remember that the texture of skin differs, and that that which beautifies one may have the opposite effect on another. A very thin, transparent skin cannot take the treatment given a thick, heavy skin. Plump women are usually less lined than their more sensitive, thin

sisters. Their tissues are filled out and the skin is drawn tightly over the underlying structures.

Therefore take a hint from nature. Stimulate the tissues with friction, smooth out the lines and feed the skin with suitable nourishment.

Now you must experiment until you find just the kind of creams and lotions that agree with your skin. It is astonishing how the chemistry as well as the texture of the skin differs. What proves a wonderful rejuvenator in one case, does harm in another. Once having found what agrees with you, allow no one to beguile you into using anything else.

First prepare the skin for massage. Cleanse it thoroughly with warm water and Castile soap, or with cleansing meals, or with cleansing creams. These various methods of removing the soil and grime from the pores may all be employed, but not on the same occasion, of course. Once or twice a week use the cleansing meals.

If your skin is badly in need of treatment it is well to open the pores, after the cleansing process, with hot towels. Never apply the cream in lumps. Warm it first. Apply a goodly quantity. You are now ready for the actual massage.

All movements must be upward from the chin and outward from the nose to the ears and temples. Never, *never* rub down. Use firm, gentle strokes. With the palms of the hand, stroke the flesh up from the chin toward the temple.

To round out the cheeks and erase the lines that run down from the corners of the nose, pick up the tissues on the cheeks and roll them between the forefinger and thumb, working up and out, always toward the temples. Repeat over and over again until considerable cream is worked in and the skin glows. This is tremendously stimulating to relaxed as well as to sagging tissues, which gradually regain their youthful elasticity.

For the lines at the corners of the mouth, place the finger tips in this situation: press against the underlying bony framework, describe little circles and gradually advance upward, lifting the tissues at the same time. Go around the corners of the mouth, and around and around the cheeks; repeat several times. Then grasp the cheeks between two outstretched fingers, scissors fashion, claw and lift, away from the cheek, *up and always up.*

If you work with the palms held downward toward the face and the thumbs pressed against the temple, you can "scissors" the tissues between the first and second fingers very successfully.

Do not hesitate to use plenty of cream, but work gently and carefully. Do not bruise the skin. It must be rosy, not blotchy, when you have finished.

For the lines on the forehead, cream and stretch the skin smooth with the thumb and forefinger of the left hand, while you describe circles over the lines with the fingers of your right.

For frowns and furrows between the eyes, stretch the skin as described.

Then use the *heel* of your right hand; press as firmly as you want here, and rub around and around, finishing with firm strokes from the center of the brow outward.

The eyes now claim your attention. Anoint each forefinger with warm cream, and begin upon the upper lid at the inner corner. Describe a complete circle, out and around the lower lid, back to where you started. If the skin is discolored and wrinkled, this treatment must be repeated over and over again until considerable cream has been absorbed. For crow's-feet treat one side at a time. Draw the skin tight toward the temple; then with the other hand, rub in circles around and around, using either the heel of the hand or the balls of the fingers.

Massage of the under eyelid requires

special care. The eye is a delicate organ and the skin of the under lid very thin; that is why it lines so easily. Anoint with cream. Now take your middle finger and press with a vibratory motion from the nose to the temple. This is a movement pursued by the most expert beauty specialists abroad. It strengthens the relaxed muscles of the eyelid.

Never press the *upper* lid down, as you may injure the eye; go lightly over it as described above. The *under* lid can be treated for lines, wrinkles, puffs, and sagginess as outlined above. Go over the tissues in this vibratory manner again and again.

Do not forget the nose. Rub it gently yet firmly with the finger tips, from the roots outward toward the tip, and upward toward the bridge.

Now finish with heavy strokes. Use the palms of the hands; press these into the jaw, cupping the chin. Stroke firmly up toward the ears. Run the finger tips behind the ears. With the finger tips of each hand on the forehead above the nose, stroke firmly out toward the temples and around to the ears. Stroke and gently pat the entire face and under the chin thoroughly to stimulate the circulation.

Treat the neck to the cream with a series of circular movements, pulling the skin up toward the chin and out to the ears. Now remove any excess cream and apply either cold compresses or a cold astringent wash.

Formulæ for creams and lotions will gladly be mailed to readers who write in for them, inclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope for private reply.

ANSWERS TO READERS

TRUAX.—The swelling of your face must arise from some nervous condition, since it is, as you say, purely local and since you have been examined by a number of physicians who find nothing wrong with you. Sometimes local swelling of this kind is caused by an article of the diet that disagrees with one. You might endeavor to search this out. Eggs are often at fault; pork is another food that is not well carried, and sea food sometimes gives rise to this condition. Let me suggest that you go over your diet very carefully, that you take an abundance of water to flush out the system and that you write me more fully on your condition for further advice.

ADMIRER.—Upon complete recovery from the major operation to which you refer, normal habits may be resumed. There is undoubtedly a greater degree of nervousness experienced after this kind of an operation, but if the system is fed with certain glandular elements that have been removed, the health is likely to be better than it ever has been. If you care to write me more fully it would give me great pleasure to assist you toward a solution of your difficulties.

JUNIPER.—Yes, deep pits and scars can be almost completely removed by cosmetic surgery. You would of course not be able to do this for yourself, nor are skin specialists doing this work. It is done entirely by those who specialize in cosmetic work. If you are not able to put yourself in the hands of a high-priced specialist I shall be very glad to give you what little directions I can, if you will write me again.

MERTON.—Redness of the nose and cheeks is a disease called "rosacea." It is by no means always caused by alcoholics. Nor is the digestive tract invariably at fault, although there is usually some defect in alimentation that requires correction. Indeed, the general system must be overhauled, as it were, and intestinal antiseptics combined with local measures to effect a cure.

C. C. W.—Dandruff, scurf or a greasy scalp shows an unhealthy condition, and calls for frequent shampooings and then the application of a suitable remedy. There is a wonderful shampoo concerning which I would like to tell you; it not only cleanses the scalp but it feeds the hair cells. This shampoo can be used in all conditions, but a remedy for dandruff depends on the kind of dandruff you are troubled with. I should like to tell you more, and will do so if you will write for private reply.

UNHAPPY.—Do let me put you in touch with the iron tonic in powder form. This, with breathing exercises and a fattening diet, cannot fail to increase your weight in a short time.

MRS. RALPH D.—The fact that you have never had any development of the bust and that nothing you have employed is of the

slightest help, indicates that there is no glandular development. Write to me for private reply on this question.

I. M.—My dear little girl, you did inclose a stamp, but you did not give me your street address, and no name! Do write again; you must repeat your questions, as I shall not be able to remember them.

X. X. X.—To be fleshy in spots amounts to a positive deformity, as you say. Exercise is difficult because of the situation of some of the affected regions, as for instance a lump of adipose tissues between the shoulder blades or just beneath the nape of the neck. Whipping by means of a series of light rods has been employed to break up the cells in such places. However, there is a reducing cream on the market concerning which I will gladly tell you. Its use is beneficial to the system, besides removing fat layers.

Miss F. H. J.—You are rather young to show signs of encroaching years. Cares, one's disposition and the tendency to worry produce this state. It is very deplorable. Can you overcome the habit of worry? It gets you nowhere and is decidedly harmful. Since the simple wash I often give does not help you, try the following astringent lotion: Tannic acid, ten grains; tincture of benzoin, twelve ounces; elder-flower water, three ounces; rose water, six ounces.

Cecelia R.—Although you inclosed a stamp you failed to write out your name, and it is impossible to make out the street. It would please me greatly if my readers who desire a private reply would do me the kindness to inclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope; by that I mean I wish they will kindly address an envelope to themselves, put a two-cent stamp upon it, and inclose it in their letter to me. Many of my readers use a pencil, and write so faintly that it is often difficult to decipher the name and address. I shall be highly gratified if you will do this for me in future.

Eva R.—I have mailed you a reply, but doubt if it will reach you, as it was impossible to make out your name and address to any satisfaction.

Mrs. R. M.—I am glad you get so much out of this department. It would have given me the greatest pleasure to send you a letter as requested; but your name is indefinite. Won't you please write again? No stamp nor address is inclosed with your letter.

Bernetta.—You also are guilty of failing to give a street address and to inclose a stamped envelope. I am anxious to tell you the things you want to know, and hope you will write again. You must have failed to see the article "How Shall I Dress My Hair?" Be sure to get a copy of the magazine containing this article.

E. W., of Toronto.—You give us merely your city—no stamp, no street address. Won't you please write again?

Beauty.—All beauty you possess is negatived by the unsightly state of your complexion; you are very wise in realizing this, though foolish to allow it to make you so unhappy. It is not an unusual experience to consult many doctors on a poor complexion and receive no help. There is a famous skin specialist in New York City who treats very successfully the worst cases of acne—that is, pimples and blackheads. Your case is a difficult one because the pimples, being so plentiful, merge into one another and become very sore. This condition, called acne vulgaris, is one of the most difficult to cure; yet, my dear, I can promise you a cure.

The trouble with my readers is that they expect to get something which they can buy at a local drug store for a few pennies. You must not expect this; you must expect to pay for choice remedies, and to carry out advice to the letter. Now a nasty case of acne vulgaris requires internal as well as external treatment. Only by such treatment can the condition be cured. On receipt of a self-addressed, stamped envelope I will tell you about this cure.

L. L. D.—Large hips certainly do detract from a boyish form, so desirable in young girls to-day. You must concentrate all your efforts at reduction upon this one region. Select such exercises as bring the muscles situated there into active play. Among these bicycle riding is excellent. You can improvise a method in your bedroom; for instance, sit astride a chair and go through the motions of bicycle riding. Leg circling is another good exercise. Lie flat upon your back on a hard surface, elevate one leg at a time, and describe a complete circle. Repeat five times. Rest, exercise the other leg, rest, repeat, and so on, short of fatigue.

Merry-Go-Round.—Blemishes mar the most shapely, well-preserved hands, and should not be tolerated for a moment. Warts and brown spots can be removed, but moles and birthmarks must under no conditions be treated by any but a physician. Painting warts lightly with glacial acetic acid will cause their disappearance. The application should be made twice each day with a cam-

el's hair brush, holding a blotter close up to the wart so that none of the acid escapes to the surrounding skin. If it becomes "sore" omit a few applications, resuming again as soon as the soreness disappears. If the applications are properly made the wart will be banished and no scar remain.

A lotion for moist and red hands is here given: Muriate of ammonia, one dram; aromatic vinegar, one ounce; distilled water, one quart. Mix. This makes a nice preparation to carry in one's scent bottle. The care of the nails has been given many times recently. For anything further write me personally.

ORLANDO.—I will gladly contribute an article on bowel torpidity. The subject is one of extreme importance, because a healthy activity of the intestinal tract is at the very root of good health. Note that I said *good health;* the majority of us have only indifferent health, and this condition to which you allude is very, very common. There is a preparation on the market, preferred by all physicians who are acquainted with it; I refer to a liver and intestinal tonic laxative. This preparation will help you, and if you will write me for private reply I will put you in touch with it. In the meantime include olive oil in your daily diet, also such fruits as figs, stewed prunes, stewed apricots and peaches, and such vegetables as tomatoes, spinach and raw cabbage. Take plenty of water. Change your diet frequently, as the power of foods lessens in direct proportion to the frequency of their use.

EMMIE G.—It is an easy matter to reduce a double chin. Success lies in the persistence with which you carry out the directions given. Use a nonfattening cream, or, better still, a reducing cream. I will give you the name of one if you will apply to me for private reply. Pick the flesh up in tiny folds and roll it firmly between the fingers. This dissolves the fatty tissue, and at the same time you knead in the reducing cream, which has a similar effect. Follow the massage with firm upward strokes and then apply ice or iced compresses.

ELLA X.—French vaseline is redder than ours, and is much more efficacious; that is why I advise it. Of course, if your druggists cannot supply it, you must use what you can get; or write to me and I will give you the address of a firm of chemists who import it.

MILDRED B.—Try this for chapped hands: Benzoinated zinc ointment, one ounce; camphor, five grains. Be careful to dry the hands thoroughly after each washing, and then anoint them with oil.

SOPHIE G.—Cleanliness is next to godliness. No self-respecting person can permit the body to become soiled, or so much so that soap and water will not remove the grime. I would suggest that you rub your skin with fresh lard, then remove it with a clean towel or soft cloth. Do this repeatedly until the skin seems clean. Prepare a bath of warm —not hot—water, containing one pound of washing soda and one half pound of pure soft soap. Immerse the body in this bath for twenty to thirty minutes, rubbing the skin gently with a soft brush. If the skin becomes irritated, anoint with cold cream.

You cannot keep your skin clean if you wear soiled underclothes. The garments that touch the skin should be changed daily. It is an easy matter to wash out simple undergarments, such as the hose, et cetera, every night, thereby insuring a fresh outfit for the next day.

SADYE.—Here is an excellent preparation for thin eyebrows and eyelashes: Cologne, two and one half ounces; glycerin, one and one half ounces; fluid extract of jaborandi, two ounces. You can have half of this quantity made. Apply with a fine brush. Great care must be taken to get none of the liquid into the eyes. As I often tell my readers, *red vaseline* is excellent. It seems hard to get, so ask your druggist for French vaseline. This is heavier and redder than ours, and more penetrating.

MR. JOHN H.—The following is excellent for sensitive, delicate feet: Dried mint, one ounce; dried sage, one ounce; dried angelica, three ounces; juniper berries, one half pound; rosemary leaves, one pound. Boil twenty minutes in five quarts of water. Use a moderate heat and immerse the feet in the bath for fifteen minutes several successive nights.

BLANCHE.—If you are troubled with chronic freckles and liver spots, you need first a liver and intestinal tonic. Locally, a bleaching agent will gradually remove the blemishes by peeling the skin. I will give you full data on this if you write me direct.

SELMA T.—Read what has been told Blanche. I am sorry the various bleaches you have come across from time to time have failed to remove your tan. It is probably so deep-seated that it requires a penetrating cream which will remove the outer cuticle. On receipt of a self-addressed, stamped envelope I will gladly advise you as to an appropriate preparation.

DESPAIRING.—In addition to the malt preparation to which I refer for developing the bust, you might apply the following fattening cream every night on retiring: Cocoa butter, lanolin, olive oil, of each two ounces. Bathe the parts in hot water and rub in the cream with gentle circulatory movements, using no force. Then bathe with cold water and apply cold compresses.

BILLIE R.—A good cleanser to use frequently for an eye bath consists of: Boric acid, ten grains; camphor water and distilled water, of each one ounce. Put no more in the eye-cup than you need, and apply a fresh bath to the eyes several times daily.

A mouth wash for general use contains: Potassium chlorate, eighty grains; orange-flower water, eight ounces.

GEORGE G.—You are decidedly overweight. Since you have dieted and exercised so strenuously to no avail, you no doubt can be helped with the internal method for reduction to which I frequently allude. Write me privately for data on this.

CHARLES B.—I am glad to answer your question. The idea that every boil is worth five dollars to the system is absurd; also the belief that boils must be poulticed and drawn out of the system to effect a cure. A boil is caused by pus germs gaining an entrance into the skin at some localized spot and setting up housekeeping there. The back of the neck is a favorite place, because the coat collars of men collect much soil which is rubbed into the skin in that situation. The sooner the microbic household is dislodged by means of a physician's lance the better.

MISS ALICE G. H.—Cleanliness of the face and body is the only cure for blackheads. Never try to pick out these blemishes with the finger nails. The skin should be softened with a skin food or hot towels, and the "grubs" moved with a comedon extractor, purchasable in any drug store. After removing them, an astringent wash should be applied. An internal cleanser will help along the good work. Send to me for this and for the proper measures to follow.

MILLS K.—I very rarely have a request for something to keep curly hair straight; it is usually the opposite—to make straight hair curly! The following tonic will make curly hair smooth and straight: Beef suet, eight ounces; yellow wax, one ounce; castor oil, one ounce; benzoic acid, five grains; oil of lemon, one half gram; oil of cassia, eight drops. Mix the suet and wax over slow heat; add the castor oil and acid; allow them to cool properly and then add the other oils. Apply to the hair as you would any other pomade.

MRS. E. A.—Cold cream has a tendency to cause superfluous hair on some skins. Vanishing cream does not usually cause superfluous hair, although it may in some cases. If you cleanse your skin with a meal mixture—such as almond meal, oatmeal, and powdered Castile soap in equal parts—in addition to the occasional use of cleansing creams, your skin will not become clogged.

VIEVA.—I can think of nothing more foolish than your desire to have your dimples deepened. Look forward into the years to come. Can you see what the condition of your face would be then?

HALLIE B.—I will gladly repeat the mouth wash to be used for an offensive breath: Phenol, fifteen drams; boric acid, six drams; thymol, fifteen grains; essence of menthol, thirty drops; tincture of anise, one and one half drams; distilled water, three pints. Dilute in accordance with your individual needs. This can also be used with splendid effect in a nasal douche for catarrhal conditions.

CHRONIC PIMPLES.—A pimple lotion may be ineffectual if the reasons giving rise to the condition are overlooked and allowed to go uncorrected. Bad habits of living are almost always at the root of these troublesome blemishes: indiscretion in diet—eating a mass of undigestible stuff, pastries and the like—the cigarette habit, late hours, and so forth. The face must be thoroughly cleansed with hot water and a medicinal soap—sulphur or zinc oxide. Do not use a wash cloth, but use your finger tips or a camel's hair complexion brush, which you keep thoroughly clean by dipping it after use in a one-per-cent solution of carbolic acid. For further suggestions, a tonic laxative, so necessary in this trouble, a wonderful acne cream, et cetera, you must write me personally.

L. L. J.—You can safely take two professional face treatments per week. It is only by following up the effect that one obtains lasting benefit. Meanwhile you can anoint your face every day with appropriate creams. By this means you will preserve the skin and keep your complexion young and fresh.

Dr. Winton will gladly answer, free of charge, any reasonable question on health or beauty sent her in care of this magazine. If you desire a personal answer, please inclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

The FRIEND in NEED

Department conducted by Lillian Laird

HERE are two fascinating problems, somewhat similar but different enough to be separately interesting.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I have started several letters to you and have always ended by tearing them up. I read your letters in LOVE STORY MAGAZINE with just as much interest as I do the stories. I have a wonderful father and mother. My mother has sat in an invalid chair for seventeen years, helpless. I have the care of her during the day and father helps me at night, so you can see how most of my life has been spent. People tell me I am one girl in a thousand but I do not feel that I am. Sometimes I just feel that I would like to have wings and fly to I don't know where. I get so discouraged. I never let mother know, for while her mind is clear and bright she is just like a little, spoiled child. My father has petted her all her life and she has known nothing else. I have two brothers, but both are married, have nice wives and families, so the cross has fallen on me to bear.

I was married about eight years ago and thought it would mean more happiness in my life, but my husband grew restless under the strain and just went away. He sent for me but I couldn't stay. I tried it but my heart kept telling me where my duty was, so back home I came to take it up again. Mother cried for me all the time. I was torn between love and duty. It was terrible. At last I realized if his love had been strong enough he would have helped me bear it, but I guess it wasn't. His people have been wonderful to me. He took to drinking and finally wanted another woman, so I divorced him, although it almost put me in my grave.

The doctors thought if I had something different to occupy my mind I'd get well quicker, so I went to work in a department store and got a woman to stay with mother. I tried going to business school at night in a frenzy of trying to forget, and broke down completely and had to come home. Time softens all sorrows, though.

About a year ago I met a young man that had been wanting to meet me, and as time went on he was so sweet and good to me that I could not help caring for him. He has been across the water, was a soldier and came home with high honors, and he never has done anything to mar my confidence in him. But now he is getting restless and wants to go to New York—we live in the Middle West—where he has been offered a position, one that is of much benefit to him, with a high salary attached. He wants me to go with him. He has accepted it and says he has our future to look to and thinks I should be willing to go. But my heartstrings keep tugging at me to stay with mother, and I love him so because he has made life bright for me. I love him more than I did my husband, as he is a cleaner, better man in every way. I can't tell mother these things; she wouldn't understand at all. It would mean death to her, she says, if I leave her, and she never is satisfied with anybody else except papa, and of course he works during the day. Money is no object to me, but I feel as if I'll never see the sun again if my lover leaves me. I am rich in a host of dear, loyal friends, but they are so busy I don't burden them with my worries. Please write to me, and you may print some of this long letter if you care to. They call me PEGGY.

The best solution to this problem would be, it seems to me, to bring your mother with you to New York, if your father is not anchored out there. Let us see what the Circle says.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I am a young girl of twenty-two years of age. I have been working as a stenographer in one office for seven years. When I was sixteen my father died, leaving the care of my invalid mother and three small brothers and one small sister to me. I have done all right so far. The children are attending school and I fix everything for my mother before I leave in the morning. Now, Mrs. Laird, is the problem. I am tired of working, tired of worrying. My mother doesn't want me to have any girl or boy friends, but there is a rich old man who comes home right often, and lately he has been showing me much attention. My mother says that he would be a fine man for a husband, that if I marry him I won't have any more worrying and fretting to do. But I told her that I could not and would not marry that old man because I love a younger fellow, and though he hasn't as much money as this old man I prefer him a thousand times.

My friend is in a similar fix. He, too, has a mother to support, but he said that he thought by practicing a little economy we could get married and still help our mothers. I suggested that we get married and I keep my position, but he said that he would not marry me on those conditions because if he could not support a wife he did not want any. He is forbidden to come to my house, but I meet him on the outside—when I get a chance.

I told my mother what he said, and she upbraided me something terrible, said I was trying to deprive her and her children of the luxuries of life, that I had no more feeling for her than if she were the ground under my feet. But really, Mrs. Laird, do you think that if I marry this old man I will find any happiness in life? Excuse the expression, but I think that my life would be a continual hell on earth.

If you have any lonesome girls I wish you would send them my address and let me have a little pleasure out of corresponding friends. BLANCHE.

To Mrs. H. B. M.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: Why should Mrs. H. B. M. even consider such a man, brute that he is? Don't go back to him! Don't throw away your life on him; don't let his threats worry you. Ask for police protection if he bothers you, or go to your lawyer about it.

I am going to tell you my story, not because I think it was brave but because what I can do two or more can do. I was put out to earn my bread at thirteen; at sixteen I was married. I thought him the most wonderful man in the world, handsome, well dressed, everything that goes to make up what one thinks a wonderful man when one is young. Twenty-four hours after our marriage he went away to another town "to open the home that was to be his and mine." Three weeks went by and he neither wrote nor returned. I learned from gossip that he was an ex-convict for manslaughter, a drunkard, a gambler. I would have overlooked it had he told me before; I was so in love with him. I investigated the stories and found them to be true.

One day he surprised me by returning. He said, "I have a home fixed for you." I was so happy I kicked myself for mistrusting him. I thought I'd give him a chance. Yes. I got in the car with him, and I can't tell you some of the terrible things he said to me on our way. Mrs. Laird wouldn't print such filth. Among other things he accused me of being unfaithful to him.

At last we drove up to a nice big farmhouse. "We get out here," he said. "You will work for these people. You are big and strong; good cook. You must help me earn a living."

I had seven men to cook for, babies to care for, women to be ordered around by. I was so dazed over it I did as I was told. He got meaner every breath he drew, cursed me and beat me. He kept me bumming from one State to another. Then he pulled a new one on me. He said, "I will not live with you or support you—he hadn't been, anyway—unless you bear me a child." When I found a little one was coming to us, how happy I was! I thought, "He will now be good to me." But here are a few of the cruel, cruel words he said to me: "The brat is not mine. I'll not support a kid that don't belong to me. If you bring it into the world I'll kill it and you, too."

What was I to do? He made me work; he made me go hungry until I could not walk. He told me he now had me where he wanted me, thinking I would never leave him in the condition I was in. He knew my father had disowned me. At last it was impossible to bear it longer. A few friends went together and collected six dollars and twenty cents for me. He was like an angry bull, I was told afterward, when he found out I'd left. He declared I'd run away with another man. I went to a doctor, told him my story, and asked him if he could get me some work. Hubby trailed around and found me, begged me to come back. My father came and told me to go back to my husband or he would send me to the reform school for life; I would disgrace his name and family if I in-

sisted on getting a divorce. But I had a good friend in the doctor, and also a lawyer, so I just laughed at their threats. You do the same, Mrs. H. B. M.! My father had me in court five times, and *I won every time*. They thought in my condition I would yield. For three hours one lawyer, father, and hubby pleaded with me. But I told them he had had his chance; I would never go back. I worked as long as I could and at last a baby girl came to me—so sweet. I looked into the future. How could I tell her of her father when she asked? I did not have one penny to my name. I couldn't even buy clothes. At last I gave her up, I know for her own good. One year later I got a divorce, and about four years after that I married again, a really wonderful man. But, sorry as I am to say it, he never got the trust and faith I put in the man who first broke my heart. But I love him. We have a darling red-headed baby boy. Father has never taken me back, although we correspond.

Dear, learn by my experience. Never let this tragedy happen to you. Mrs. Laird has my address if you care to write. I am near your age: twenty-two. It cost quite a few tears to write this, Mrs. Laird, but if it will help Mrs. H. B. M. I give them with a great joy. MOTHER OF A CALIFORNIA POPPY.

I wonder if any one, after reading this letter, can still write to me and say: "Why do people want to get a divorce?" Can any one read of such a man and say that a girl should remain at his mercy, and moreover, bring children into the world to be abused by him and to inherit his evil tendencies? Men like that should be barred from decent society, for they are not fit for it.

Of course you love your second husband in a better way than you did the first. But you are a woman now, and one who has suffered, so naturally you are not so blindly attached as you were before. One does not have the palpitating, unreasoning thing which is first love, to give again, but the love of years and experience is a thousand times more trustworthy, a thousand times more real.

By the way, Mrs. H. B. M., you had many letters, and I'll be glad to send them to you if you'll let me.

"Who Hath Ears to Hear, Let Him Hear"

MY DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I am a constant reader of LOVE STORY MAGAZINE. I think you are wonderful to devote so much of your time to the woes, real or imagined, of others. But after having read so many of the letters printed I am wondering if we have developed into a race of whiners.

I married rather young a man I loved dearly, and who loved me. We had two dear little boys, and our home was an ideal one. After nineteen years he decided that his responsibilities were too great for his broad shoulders to carry, so he dropped out of my life. For almost a year I heard nothing from him, neither did his people. Then he wrote me a very casual letter saying he would send for us within a few weeks. I am sure friend husband received the surprise of his life when he received my answer, and I have neither seen nor heard from him since.

At first I was bewildered, and in six weeks' time my hair was beginning to gray, and there were lines in my face that should not have been there. After some hard praying I rid my heart of all ill feeling, gave myself a mental shake, took stock of my few accomplishments, and made the plunge. I realized that I was a better cook than anything else, so after weighing the pros and cons I rented an apartment, advertised my work, and was almost swamped at once.

I asked neither my family nor my husband's for assistance. I had all of the necessities and lots of extras, owed no man, and had a nest egg, too. To-day I am traveling for a big concern, much against the wishes of my two stalwart sons, but I think it wrong to handicap a young man, and, besides, I have my independence. My friends tell me I look younger than ever, I am getting more out of life than ever before, and I attribute it all to work. To my way of thinking, work is the panacea for every ill. I find time to play a bit, too, and I always read something worth while at night. I see new faces every day, make lots of good friends, and have been treated royally wherever I've gone. I have a broader outlook on life, a bigger tolerance for my fellow men, and at the end of the day a feeling of well-being, of something accomplished.

I did not mean to write at such length, but don't you see, Mrs. Laird, how I could have let my sorrow embitter me, make me old before my time? I just want to tell all these men and women who write you that if they will only stop thinking of themselves

so much and of others more they will be so much happier. "Carry on!"

Smile a while, and while you smile some other smiles.

And soon there's miles and miles of smiles, and life's worth while because *you* smile.

A Worker.

You are absolutely right, and I wish more women would imitate your example. Ill health is the only excuse for repining, and even that can be improved by one's attitude toward it. Won't you write again?

To Lonely Wife—and All Expectant Mothers

Dear Mrs. Laird: I am twenty-seven years old and an expectant mother, and, as is often the case, I am lonely and blue. This is my fourth baby so I understand, but Lonely Wife sounds as if her baby was the first. Whatever you do, Lonely Wife, treat your husband as best you can, for no man, no matter how much he loves you, realizes your hopes over your baby. He doesn't have the wonderful little clothes to make or try to imagine what it will look like and plan for it, as we do. I love to think of my babies before they are here, and if you will write to me I'd love to correspond with you. My first marriage was a failure, but I love my second husband and he loves me. I can do anything with him. We never quarrel, for when he's peeved I leave him alone and he does the same to me. I have no women friends, and would be glad to have one to write to. Write to Mrs. Laird and she will send you my address. Take heart, and remember the lovely little soul in your care. I really think we women are blessed by God to let us model His likeness for Him. They say Eve was cursed, but was she?

Happy Wifie of L. A.

To the Stranger in a City

Lady dear: I sympathize with Carolina and Joe Murray, but I guess they need something besides sympathy. Isn't there any Y. W. C. A. or Y. M. C. A. they could join and thus become acquainted? I know if they would join that they would soon meet friends.

If Mr. Murray is a Mason he could attend meetings at any of the lodges and meet many friends. The same applies to Carolina—the Eastern Stars. If Mr. Murray is not a Mason, why doesn't he join a fraternal order? There are so many of them: the Elks, the Knights of Pythias, et cetera. I know that Carolina could not join the Eastern Stars unless she is the wife, widow, mother, sister, or daughter of a Master Mason.

Nurse Dorothy.

What She Thinks of Men

My dear Mrs. Laird: I know it's foolish, yes, very foolish, for me to write to you, and after you get through reading this you'll wonder *why* I ever wrote. I think your department in Love Story is wonderful. You give the most wonderful advice to others, and surely if they heed it they will find this world a better place to live in.

I am a young girl, twenty years of age. I am trying to come to something in this world, and hope that soon you'll all hear of me. I read an answer you gave not so very long ago, telling a girl of seventeen not to be discouraged, for she is trying to be a writer. No. She need not be discouraged. She's young. Her chance will come yet, just as mine has come. I started when I was sixteen, four years ago. To look ahead four years is a long time, but now as I look back those four years were not wasted. I have not succeeded yet, but I will. I have every chance now, and the one who in the end succeeds is the one who says he will.

I have had other experiences in my life—that is, with the other sex. Two years ago a married man who has sons my own age tried his very best to lead me wrong. He promised me all sorts of things. Oh, yes, he said he'd lay the world at my feet, if I would "just be nice to him." I laughed in his face, and then I nearly took the roof of the house off. I told him never to step his foot in my way again, that I hated him, and he should go home to his wife. Then, of course, I wasn't so grand any more. He called me names and left in a bloomin' fit of temper.

Then another time a cousin of mine tried to get cute, too. I set him down in the same manner, and every man that I went with got smart, so now—can you blame me—I hate men, and I don't go with any.

Of course, I know that all men are not alike, and I hope some day I'll find one out of them that will be different to me. Right at the present time there is a married couple that come here to call on my parents, and of course the man doesn't fail to notice me right off the bat. I told him the other night to behave, for I know his wife doesn't like it. He says she doesn't have to like it, and how can he behave when he looks at my flashing black eyes. After this I'll be gone when they come here. Oh, why are men such fools?

There was a man in the army who said he'd kill me and himself, too, if I didn't marry him. Well, I didn't marry him, and as it seems, I'm pretty well alive yet. I also know where he's at, and he's still living. It all sure sounds like a good joke. Of course, I have not said anything about myself and why I seem to cause so much trouble for myself. I'm a perfect-built woman, not a little mite, you know, and I'm a great tease, but I don't think I'm a bit pretty.

Oh, yes, girls write about kissing the boys, and I think you're right on all your answers there. If only the girls will heed!

My, this is so terrible long. Did I bore you? I know you can't print this, as it's too long, and it was foolish of me to write to you, but I've been thinking of writing for so long, and now I have.

I wish you the best of success, Mrs. Laird, oh, the very best, and in turn won't you wish me the same? Also good luck to the Circle and LOVE STORY.

YOUR FRIEND OF INDIANA.

Both your letters were very welcome, and I hope you come again. If your offer of help to any of my girls is genuine, however, you should reveal your name. We do wish you success, though the road you have chosen is a rough one and long. Many people think it is easy to write, but it means months and years of study and apprenticeship, just as success in any other profession or trade does. They need a few dollars so sit down and dash off something that sounds all right to them—and then say the editor did not read the story because it was not published. *Every manuscript submitted* to a magazine is given a fair judgment because an editor is an incurable optimist and hope springs eternal in his breast that there will yet be something purchasable in the unsolicited-manuscript box. And occasionally there is! Mrs. Harry Pugh Smith and Madeleine Buchanan, for instance, started like the rest of you. They had the gift, the indispensable vital spark, and to it they added work and persistency, effort and "stick-to-it-iveness," and then more hard, hard work.

What the inexperienced would-be writer does not see is that fiction must be carefully built, painstakingly pruned and polished, written and rewritten. The more smoothly a story reads, the more labor has been expended on it.

You know all this, and you must also know that oftentimes literature has to be "its own exceeding great reward," for one gets no other. Have you read Andrew Lang's "How to Fail in Literature"? Do. It is delightful.

Thanks for giving me the opportunity to deliver this little homily.

Another Girl's Opinion of "These Men"

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I am a constant reader of LOVE STORY and think it the best magazine put out. Some months ago I wondered just as One Who Would Like To Know. It surely does pay to be "dignified" when going out with young men. Here's hoping she will keep it up.

I used to go out with friends, most of whom wanted to kiss me good night, but oh, no, I would not allow that. Some time ago I met a young man at a dance. I went home with him and he was the very nicest fellow I ever met. I am going steady with him now, and I'm so glad that I did not let every "Tommy" kiss me because he is not that kind. He would he shocked to think of me doing that.

So don't lose courage, One Who Would Like To Know. There surely are boys who have respect for girls, and when your Mr. Right comes along you will see the difference between him and others. HAPPY LOU.

ANSWERS to UNPUBLISHED LETTERS

A White Man, Wisconsin

I am not printing your letter, not because I am afraid to take your "dare" but because it would needlessly hurt the feelings of a large number of our readers and also because you—perhaps willfully—misunderstood the writers of those letters yours purports to answer.

Patsy, Arkansas

The man is right. You cannot know at your age what sort of man you will like, nor what sort of person you will be yourself when you are twenty. You have not seen enough men nor had enough experience to be able to judge whether he is "the only one

for you." If girls would only not be in such a hurry to throw their youth away!. There's plenty of time for marriage. Enjoy your freedom while you have it.

L. M. P., Texas

If this love is really so great it will endure until you and the boy are grown up, and then you can marry and have things as they should be. Just yet you could not marry without your parents' consent, and it would not be fair to a boy that age to marry him and saddle him with a wife to support when he has not yet started in life. Don't think so much about getting married. There really are other things in the world for a girl to plan about, and you'll be a thousand times better off if you'll make up your mind to be self-supporting for a while first.

THE CORRESPONDENTS' CORNER

Girls! Before you write please be sure that your mothers approve of your forming a friendship in this way. Also, if you desire to correspond with the writers of these particular letters, please send your letter—with fresh stamp enclosed—to be forwarded instead of asking me for the address.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I have been reading in your little LOVE STORY MAGAZINE, loaned me by a friend, of the sunshine you are bringing into the lives of others. Now, I do not know as I come under your list but I do really get lonely at times.

I am the widow of a Civil War veteran. He died fourteen months ago after many years of happy married life. I am entirely alone in the world, having no children or any living relatives. As I am almost totally deaf and in winter can get out but little, a cheery letter from some woman who also is alone, or any one inclined to write, would cheer me. And as reading is such a comfort I thought some of the friends who have old books or magazines they did not care for might kindly send them to me. Reading is about all the enjoyment I have, and to subscribe to many papers is beyond my means. I may not come under your way of working but decided to write anyway. Possibly I could cheer some one also. You know we can all do our bit, as it were.

MRS. S. I. W.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: You were so kind to print my letter before, and I enjoyed the answers. I have another favor to ask of the readers. I am very fond of music and I would like to get the song of the "Dying Cowboy" and the "Texas Ranger," and one that has a chorus that goes: "I have no mother now." If any of the readers have those three songs and will send them to me, I will sure appreciate it. VIRGINIA.

DEAR MRS. LAIRD: I've written about five letters to you, but after I'd read them over they seemed so nonsensical I didn't want to waste your time, but I'm still writing, and I'll really send this one because I've decided not to read it. I want to tell you first how much I enjoy your corner. I always save it last for "dessert." There are some mighty interesting letters sent in which I simply devour. Mrs. Laird, I felt so sorry for Lonely Wife, and I'll write to her if you have her address. I think if she keeps up her courage, after the baby comes, if he is a real man, it will make all the difference in the world. But, dear Lonely Wife, don't worry now. Take long walks and stay in the open as much as possible.

Rosy Mack, don't ruin your life. Write to your hubby's daughter and if it's possible ask her to come and visit with you, and when she comes be as affectionate as you can and make her as happy as you can. She needs love as much as you do. You'll have such a wonderful feeling after you've done that, instead of being mean about it, and your hubby will be happy, too.

I wonder, Mrs. Laird, if you can give some girls' addresses? I am twenty-one years of age, love football games and hiking. I play the piano fairly well—that is, when I'm near one. I haven't any. I sing and at present belong to a glee club. Won't some of the readers send in their addresses? I love to write letters. I'm going on a twelve-mile hike Wednesday. I guess I'm rather silly, Mrs. Laird, but I am romantic. I love to picture myself a heroine! But I guess we can't help our natures, can we? My best wishes to you and also to the other members of the LOVE STORY staff. BEBE.

Mrs. Laird will be glad to answer, either in these pages or by a personal letter, any problems on which you desire her advice. If you wish, your letters will be treated in absolute confidence, but when permitted, we will publish those we have room for, and you may find a "friend in need" in one another. Those who wish to correspond with other readers may do so, but Mrs. Laird cannot forward letters from men to girls nor from girls to men.

When the immediate personal reply is requested, please inclose a stamp. Address Mrs. Russell E. Laird, Love Story Magazine, 79 Seventh Avenue, New York, N. Y.

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